How playing as each other might bring us together

A study of identification in games

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Summary

Games are a promising tool whose value to influence notions of the self and the world should not be underestimated (Mul, 2015, p. 181). In contemporary societies, the integration of foreign cultures in multicultural societies is often met with much opposition (Appadurai, 2002, p. 44). Games might affect cultural awareness through the identification with foreign cultures. This thesis seeks to explore the value of games in multicultural societies by researching the identification in games with foreign cultures. The research uses a combined approach of autoethnography and ethnography to investigate how game audiences experience identification. Such an approach is lacking in the developing field of game studies (Shaw, 2013). Identification will be analysed by combining narrative identification with interactive identification. This research shows, amongst the most important findings, that games, due chiefly to interactive identification in combination with narrative identification, have a unique potential to be a communicative tool for cultural awareness. Games affect the audience's cultural awareness through the identification with cultural gameplay mechanics, the discussion between the self and the role-played character and the personal narrative.

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Introduction

"The play's the thing, wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king"

William Shakespeare, in Hamlet (Shakespeare, 2017)

In the quote above, Hamlet is speaking to us. Hamlet is telling us that he hopes a theatre play, representing the murder of a king, will arouse the conscience of king Claudius. Hamlet hopes to catch king Claudius 'red faced', feeling guilty for killing old king Hamlet. Apparently, Shakespeare and Hamlet believe that the theatre play holds a power in its representation of life that might touch the audience's empathy. Hamlet seems to believe that king Claudius will identify with the killer in the play and consequently will start feeling remorseful. Shakespeare seems to believe that a play can make issues addressable which might otherwise lie outside of normal communicative conduct. Today, we have a new form of artistic and communicative expression that also allows for the representation of otherwise difficult to address subjects, games. A media form centred around the element of play, as in playing, interacting. Games might hold a similar power as the theatre play does, to identify with persons or issues that otherwise lied outside of the audience's daily experiences. Games such as *Assassins Creed* for example come close to providing an answer to the question: what is it like to live in Damascus during the crusades, or what is it like to be an Arabic assassin from Masyaf? The game gives the audience the opportunity to identify with a character in a certain situation which they would not encounter by themselves. Identification is the process through which an audience might connect with the representational content of media texts (Cohen, 2001). The process of identification with media products and narratives is a social construct. Identification forms the basis for interaction between individuals, groups and cultures because it shapes a person's understanding of social relations.

In this research, the identification process in games will be explored. It is my hope that understanding the identification process in games might help understand how games could serve as a vehicle for cultural awareness. Just like Hamlet hoped that the King Claudius would go through a process of identification to achieve a new remorseful awareness. Games are an important element of the new media and can play a significant part in processes of identification (Uricchio, 2005). Games supply society with a unique 'spielraum' (Mul, 2015) in which players can 'play' with and experience different identities in a safe digital environment. By identifying with a character in a game, belonging to a foreign culture, the player of the game might attain some cultural awareness. By foreign

cultures, in the context of this thesis, I mean foreign in relation to the subject person. In the context of the game, foreign culture refers to the culture that is origin to a different place or country than that of the player and that is to certain extent alien to the player. In the context of the contemporary citizen, foreign cultures are those that citizens are unfamiliar with and often do not understand. Identification with foreign cultures is important because the acceptance of foreign cultures in multicultural societies is often a painful process. Due to the introduction of global media and processes of migration, many localities are now mixtures of divergent cultures that sometimes blend together but other times might cause confrontation (Appadurai, 2002). Games, and the process of identification in games might help further the understanding of foreign cultures. In contemporary societies media images and narratives of foreign cultures affect the imagination of citizens and their processes of identification (2002). Identification with foreign cultures, or the lack thereof, has become a crucial component of everyday life in contemporary society.

Identification is experienced through the reading of narratives. Narratives are used in societies to give meaning and structure to the surrounding world. Narratives are also meaning making tools in constructing identity (Jefferson, 2004). A person creates identity and autobiographical knowledge through narratives, they structure a person's memories and beliefs in a meaningful way (Jefferson, 2004, p. 441; Habermas, 2000). The autobiographical knowledge is used for self-understanding in a life story (Habermas, 2000, p. 749). Narratives can be simply defined as "the representation of a series of logically and chronologically related events in a specific setting, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, caused or undertaken by actors" (Mul, 2015, p. 172). Media narratives, and the potential meaningful memories they create, could influence a person's world view and identity. The introduction of narratives from foreign localities and cultures into the everyday life of citizens already influences their identities and their views on the world. "In the globalized and multicultural societies that characterize present Western culture, we are increasingly in contact with narrative traditions from other cultures, while immigrants also import and assimilate these traditions in our own culture" (2015, p. 169). This thesis will research the role games might play in the assimilation of foreign cultures through media narratives by looking at the process of identification. This research strives to answer the call of Shaw to conduct an ethnographic research into the audience perception of identification to fill a gap in the field of game studies (Shaw, 2013). However, instead of focusing on only two participants I will conduct an autoethnographic research strengthened by an ethnographic research of five participants. An autoethnography strives to make the entire process of researching a subject of study, so that the reader might understand the whole experience and the researcher's motivations. In coherence with the autoethnographic tradition and

to enhance the autoethnographic analysis I will now detail the origin of my interest and its progression before I go into the theoretical exploration of identification in games.

Origin of research interest

When I was a high school student I never followed any courses Greek nor Latin, nor did I read or study Greek mythology in my spare time. I can, however, still remember a large number of the names of Greek gods, their domains, narratives and their specialities. I know this because in my spare time I used to play a game called *Age of Mythology.* In this strategy game the player steps into the shoes of a Greek, Norse or Egyptian commander and tries to build a civilization and wage war with others. All of this is done by the grace of the gods. As the name of the game suggests, the Greek, Norse and Egyptian mythologies play a crucial role in the game. At the offset of the game the player has to choose a major deity to follow, and this choice will affect the subsequent gods that can be worshipped during the game. These different gods which a player can worship affect almost all aspects of the game. Therefore, playing the game is very closely linked to the player's adaptation and knowledge of the Greek, Norse and Egyptian mythology. As a consequence, after hours of studying and playing this game, I am still familiar with all three mythologies. Whilst playing these games I was never aware of, nor did I intend to, studying the aspects of the mythologies. Nevertheless, the game mechanisms and my engagement with the game necessitated my familiarization with mythologies. Although *Age of Mythology* is a strategy game centred around building a settlement and waging war, playing the game familiarized me with aspects of Norse, Greek and Egyptian culture and not only with war tactics.

The example above shows that games can hold much more value than its common association with entertainment suggests. I have familiarized myself with cultures I was unaware of before by playing *Age of Mythology*. As a consequence, I took a keen liking to different aspects of the Norse, Egyptian and Greek mythology and pursued this interest during the rest of my life. Wherever I encountered symbols, narratives or anything relating to the mythologies showcased in *Age of Mythology*, I experienced joy and pressed the quest to find out more about these encounters. The introduction with mythology supplied by the game increased my interest in these cultures in later stages of my life. The game *Age of Mythology* was responsible for the early development of my knowledge of these classical cultures and motivated me to continue exploring the cultures. I believe that the interaction with games has implications that go beyond merely entertaining. For example, the potential to familiarize gamers with unknown cultures. Games seem to possess a quality that does not only make them a desirable pursuit for leisure time, but also a vehicle for information and exploration.

Luckily, I am not alone in seeing more potential in games. Other researchers have looked into the historical qualities of computer games, for a good overview see for example Uricchio (2005), or into the identification process with avatars (Looy, Courtois, Vocht, & Marez, 2012). An important issue because gaming is one of the new media platforms whose importance and influence is ever increasing. I wanted to understand how games such as *Age of Mythology* familiarize a gamer with a culture simply by playing the game. I started my research from the premise that games elicit a certain interaction from the gamer which, for example, enables the familiarization with cultures as I experienced whilst playing *Age of Mythology*. In the young academic field of game studies, no attempt has been made yet to use the interaction between gamer and game to detail the mechanisms of the game (Shaw, 2013).

Historical and educational value

My interest in the cultural impact of games led me to the academic debate about the historical and educational value of games. Many contemporary video games such as the *Assassins Creed* or the *Civilization* games, represent history and contain much historical information. The fact that games contain historical information gives rise to the idea that games might be useful for teaching students history (Squire, 2003). However, the notion that games contain educational and historical value was met with much scepticism and debate (Uricchio, 2005). Games such as *Civilization* are heavily criticised for their lack of historical accurateness and its western bias (Uricchio, 2005; Galloway A. R., 2006), which raises the question whether games can be effective educational vehicles. Chapmen argues that games, like any other form of text, are biased representations of history (Chapman, 2013), this does not mean that there is no historical or educational value in a game, quite the opposite. The debate surrounding the educational and cultural value of games is closely linked to my interest in the ability of games to transmit cultural knowledge. However, this debate becomes cemented in discussions of historical details and representations. Before going into the specifics of the accurateness of the knowledge and culture represented in a game, I wish to understand the mechanics of the video game that have driven my understanding of foreign cultures. Therefore, this research will briefly address the topic of cultural and historical accurateness in order to understand the context that is *Civilisation VI,* but it will not go into detailed discussions of the historical and cultural accurateness.

As I progressed I encountered the notion that identification is connected to both game interaction and game narrative and might be one of the most compelling elements for players (Bessière, Seay, & Kiesler, 2007). The possibilities for identification in video games might be greater than in other media because of the interactional component (King & Krzywinska, 2006; Wolf, 2001).

Games are in part narrating vehicles, and as with any narration the reader can identify with the narrative. Furthermore, the interaction that games require ask the player to take the position of a fictional character and act on his behalf, thereby enforcing identification even more. By experiencing identification, a gamer loses his self-awareness and is absorbed into the game whilst at the same time becoming familiar with the world and the characters of the game (Cohen, 2001). When the worlds and characters of such a game represent real life history, as they did in *Age of Mythology*, these games hold the potential of greatly improving the gamers knowledge of such histories and cultures. Therefore, I choose to pursue this topic of identification and games since it seemingly served my research interests.

Identification in games

Much of identification research in games studies is confined to applying textual analyses (MacMahan, 2003; Murphy, 2004; Rehak, 2003). Like Rehak, much identification research is also concentrated on avatars and the psychological effects of identifying with avatars (Bessière, Seay, & Kiesler, 2007; Klimmt, Hefner, & Vorderer, 2009), some looked at the influence of motion control on avatar identification and violence (Williams, 2013). Researchers have also looked at the psychological relation between "speculative play" and identification (Khalid, Yusof, Iida, & Ishitobi, 2015, p. 923). I however do not want to investigate avatar games nor psychological impacts nor do any textual analysis. I want to understand how identification works by researching the audience's reception of the game. I decided I would research the audience perception of identification in games through an ethnographic approach, filling up a gap in the study of identification in game studies (Shaw, 2013).

Cohen defines identification as "an imaginative experience in which a person surrenders consciousness of his or her own identity and experiences the world through someone else's point of view" (2001, p. 248). This imaginative experience is especially important in games because, in contrast with other forms of media such as films or books, games do not only challenge the player to imagine themselves being a different person and imagining the events happening to them; in games a player is actually asked to act and respond in the subject position of the imagined character he or she is roleplaying. Additionally, because identification is a process of imagination that happens outside of the self, the gamer has the ability to 'try on' different identities without the constraints of existing discourses. Identification is not constrained by cultural prejudices according to Cohen because the player loses his or her self-perception in the process of identification with the media character (2001).

However, I disagree with the notion that one completely let's go of their own identities during the process of identification in games. During the process of identification, a gamer might assume the role of someone else but in later reflection one relates this identity with their own. This is especially true for games such as MMORPG's (massive multiplayer online role-playing game) (Bessière, Seay, & Kiesler, 2007). In MMORPG's the player creates an often fantasy like avatar to role-play. Players of MMORPG's identify with their roleplaying characters and even go as far as to try to create an idealized version of themselves in these role-played characters which might positively affect player's state of mind (2007, p. 535). However, these games, and the identification process therein are of a complete different sort than the identification which I likely experienced in *Age of Mythology.* The main difference is that in MMORPG's the player is able to customize their role-played characters intensively and they are completely fictional. In the strategy game *Age of Mythology,* the role-played characters are given and based upon real life. Creating an ideal self is impossible in strategy, arcade etc. games because there is no customizable character. That being said, I do believe that the moments of discussion between identities can also occur in between the process of identification in strategy games. In a strategy game a player might identify with a character in the game and afterwards might relate this identified character to him or herself. Therefore, I disagree with Cohen who believes that one lets go of their own identity and cultural beliefs completely in the process of identification (2001). After reading a text or after playing a game the audience reflects on the narrative character's identity and might incorporate parts in their own identity. Think for example of how children might play and act like pirates after having seen a movie such as *Pirates of the Caribbean.* Cohen's definition of identification is nevertheless useful for analysing what steps the imagination of the player undertakes to experience identification with a game narrative. Cohen's theory on identification is lacking a consideration of the interactional component which is crucial for the appreciation of games. Cohen believes that interaction undermines identification because it involves the self of the audience. I believe interaction in games requires a different view on identification, but my own experience leads me to believe that interaction does not negate identification completely. In chapter one I will build on Cohen's notion of Identification by incorporating the interactional component of video gaming (Mul, 2015; Uricchio, 2005; Voorhees, 2009). Before going into the theorization of identification in games I will first elaborate on the importance of researching this subject.

The importance of identification and games in contemporary society

The example of *Age of Mythology* above also illustrates that, by playing the game, I have experienced identification with characters and aspects of the Greek, Norse and Egyptian culture. I have not only

identified myself with a media character, the process of identification has also familiarized me with, up until that moment, mostly unknown cultures. Identification in games, in relation to foreign cultures, is a mainly unexplored terrain in the young field of game studies. I venture to expand the knowledge on the topic of identification in games so that it might serve as a first step towards understanding the role of games in raising cultural awareness.

Identification with cultures in games is an important issue because in contemporary societies identification with foreign cultures has become a crucial and often problematic component of daily life. The media confront us with the foreign other on a daily basis, intertwining our lives with global issues:

> "In a world of migration and mass mediation, everybody is living in a world of image flows, such that it's not simply and straightforwardly possible to separate their everyday life from this other set of spaces that they engage with through the media, either as receivers, or as workers in call centres, or on interactive websites, etc." (Appadurai, 2002, p. 43)

In the fragment above Appadurai explains that contemporary citizens live in societies and cities that are no longer limited to that geographical space and culture. Migration and the mass media have spread images and narratives of foreign cultures and places around the globe and these narratives and images are confronting the contemporary citizen in his or her daily life. The introduction of foreign cultures into societies is often a painful and highly politicized process:

> "What we see now is a coercive politics of identification, in which ethnic plurality, secularism, and cultural hybridity are gradually placed under the pressure of ethnic nationalism, state insecurity and paranoia about migrants, in a way that produces coerced form of identification. Identities which are the products of forced processes of identification are invariably fragile and mutually hostile" (Appadurai, 2002, p. 44).

What Appadurai makes clear in the statement above is that the assimilation of foreign cultures into societies has often led to an increase of nationalistic and protective feelings and narratives. In turn, these narratives have influenced the identification of citizens which has led to increased mutual hostility. These tensions are exemplified by the popularization of politicians such as Donald Trump, Geert Wilders or Marine le Pen whose political agendas are in large proportion concerned with the protection of the national culture and the rejection of foreign culture. Faced with foreign cultures and these dominant political views, a citizen might be prone to cocoon him or herself out of a sense of powerlessness (Mc Guigan, 2005). A more stable environment in which to

experiment with the confrontation between cultures and identification, compared to the perhaps more politicized public sphere, could be the computer game. The cultural public sphere here is "the articulation of politics, public and personal, as a contested terrain through affective (aesthetic and emotional) modes of communication" (p. 435). A form of communication that affectively creates an alternate world outside of current cultural, social and political issues, outside of the public sphere, might be better equipped to address multicultural issues. Talking about television soaps in Britain, Mc Guigan says: "the genre has evoked multicultural harmony and downplayed racial tension. Soap opera typically ignores public controversy in the world beyond the immediate context of imagined community" (2005, p. 433). Games are able to create similar imagined worlds or communities in which meaningful narratives and identities could be explored free from political subjectivities. "despite the many rules, constraints, and difficulties of the game world, its anonymity and fantasy frees players from the yoke of their real-life history and social situation" (Bessière, Seay, & Kiesler, 2007, p. 534).

Identification as understood by Appadurai, as identifying yourself in confrontation with the other, is different from the understanding of Cohen, in which one lets go of their own identity. This difference lies in that Appadurai talks about identification as it is experienced in the broader context of societies in a cultural sense. Cohen talks specifically about identification as a result of reading media texts. In the broader context of social life identification is a process or constant re-evaluation and discussion between the self and the other. The process of identification with media texts is a smaller part of the larger process of identification in society as a whole, the part that is more reflective in the imagination and perhaps less politicized. Nevertheless, identification with media texts is a very important part of the larger identification in society because media texts are involved in shaping public opinion. The identification that takes place in computer games seems to be in the middle between identifying with a fictional character, letting go of the self, and the constant re-evaluation between the self and the other. In games a player is asked to step into the shoes of a protagonist, to identify with the fictional character. Because a player has to make choices, because the player has to interact, he or she involves him or herself (Cohen, 2001). When a player thinks about the best possible interaction with the game, he or she will think from his or her own point of view. A computer game might present a gateway between identifying with a culturally foreign character and evaluating this character in opposition to the self before subjecting the newly gained insight to the more highly politicized public sphere. As quoted from Appadurai above, in contemporary societies we are subjected to heavy amounts of "image flows" through the media (2002, p. 43). What I hypothesize is that games, and the process of identification with foreign cultures in games, have the potential to give background information to all these media image flows

which might help to counter the effect of hostile nationalistic campaigns. Mc Guigan shares a similar believe, in the following quote he explains how soap operas might influence the world view of the audience through identification:

> "The cultural public sphere trades in pleasures and pains that are experienced vicariously through willing suspension of disbelief; for example, by watching soap operas, identifying with the characters and their problems, talking and arguing with friends and relatives about what they should and should not do. Images of the good life and expectations of what can be got out of this life are mediated mundanely through entertainment and popular media discourses. Affective communication help people to think reflexively about their own lifeworld situations" (Mc Guigan, 2005, p. 435).

I believe that games are one such affective communication in which identification with other cultures can be experienced. Gamers might then proceed to talk about the characters and their problems or their interactions of the game and thereby start to give the experiences of the game a place in their own worldview and the cultural public sphere. In such a manner personal identification in games, excluded from politicized society in the imagined world, might have an impact upon the cultural public sphere. Mc Guigan describes three broad stances media texts can take to influence the politics of the cultural public sphere: uncritical populism, radical subversion and critical intervention (2005). Uncritical populism serves the consumers exactly what they want and expect. Radical subversion gives people a total transformation whether they want it or not often offensive or unintelligible. Critical intervention provides the best of the latter two, "producing a genuinely critical and potentially popular stance" (p. 438). Since games are often not considered elitist but do belong to mainstream consumer entertainment, they are in the perfect position to offer citizens critical intervention.

The problematic relations between foreign cultures within society is not subject of this investigation. The example above serves to explain why identification with foreign cultures is important in contemporary societies and the potential games have to establish this identification. The identification citizens experience while gaming affects their larger process of identification in society, which in turn might lead to a better understanding of foreign cultures. In order to understand what this process of identification with foreign cultures entails it is necessary to have a good understanding of the concept of culture. A good understanding of culture will help to understand how identification with foreign cultures is problematized.

Cultural context

Culture can be dissected between subjective and objective culture. Objective culture is the tangible part of culture, such as the presence of churches and the act of going to church (Yuen, 2011, p. 459). Whereas subjective culture refers to the values and beliefs of a group or society, being for example the belief in god. Culture exists of products, practices and perspectives that a person can adhere to in order to belong to the specific culture (Yuen, 2011). All three aspects are important elements to study if one is interested in understanding culture, but for the purposes of this thesis we must also understand how culture relates to media narratives and the process of identification.

In part culture is determined by a certain space and the material attributes, set of traditions, meanings and values belonging to that space which together create the products, practices and perspectives of culture. But as we have seen above, in contemporary society localities are no longer limited to their spatial dimension but are constructed through a mixture of different and divergent cultural narratives introduced through media and migration. Consequently, culture is not only determined by those aspects belonging to a certain space, but also by the appropriation of different narratives in the citizens mind. Appadurai makes a useful distinction here between the substantive and dimensional aspects of culture. Substantive are those aspects belonging to a certain place such as a set of tradition, commitment, meanings and values (Appadurai, 2002, p. 45). Dimensional culture on the other hand is of a more relational and contrastive nature which is constructed through the imagination. Dimensional culture attains its meaning through confrontation and differentiation with other cultures, which can lead to tensions, but not necessarily.

> "Culture is the dimension of social life and of collective identity in which the material conditions of actors, of subjects and agents, are constantly transformed by the work of the imagination. It's in the work of the imagination, I think, that the cultural dimension really lives." (Appadurai, 2002, p. 45)

A citizen is confronted with multiple narratives and by contrasting them and identifying with them through the imagination, thus the dimensional aspect of culture is constructed. The link between identification, narratives and culture therefore seems to be the imagination. If we combine Cohen's definition of identification with Appadurai's understanding of the cultural dimension we can surmise that, a person experiences identification by imagining to be someone else wo is represented in media narratives. By contrasting the different identities and narratives in our imagination we might understand the dimension of our culture. Though it is true that the practice of culture takes shape in society through social interactions, what has been described above as the dimensional

aspect of culture is what foregrounds and shapes those interactions as well as what is being shaped by these interactions. Individuals act out of a certain understanding of the social relations at that time, which can be seen as the dimensional aspect of culture, and after or during these interactions reflect on their understanding of culture being again the dimensional aspect. An individual also experiences identification through interaction and reflection.

Hence, although culture is in large part constructed through social interactions, the imagination and the dimensional aspect of culture are important elements responsible for the premise of those interactions and influence a person's process of identification as a consequence of those interactions. I will not investigate how cultural interactions are influenced by the type of identifications that occur in gaming in this thesis, instead I will investigate how the processes of identification occur in games, hypothesizing that this will influence social interactions. I will build on the understanding of culture as a dimension constructed through the imagination in order to understand identification in games and to connect identification in games with identification in society. Off course the one aspect that differentiates games from other media is interaction, and consequently I will consider the influence that this interaction has on the imagination of the player and his process of identification. But game interactions are different from social interactions in that they are not constructed, per se, by cultural coding or rules but by digital coding and the rules of the game. The digital coding and the rules of the game are off course not free from cultural biases, digital coding is also culture coding in a way. By adopting the rules of the game, a gamer has the potential to imagine himself in a different place, a new 'spielraum' in which interactions are only dictated by the rules of the game, hopefully limiting the influence of existing discourses. For this reason, this research does not focus on social interactions because they lie beyond the world of games, but on processes of identification. Identification can be experienced in games but it's effects might disseminate to social interactions after playing the game.

Research & question

Now that the preliminary search into the process of identification in games and its cultural significance is understood, this research's case study will be introduced. New game technology develops quickly, therefore the game needs to be newly developed so that it represents current game technology. Furthermore, the research interest calls for a game that allows the player to role play different cultures. These criteria are met by *Civilization VI*. *Civilization VI* is a turn-based strategy game in which players are invited to step into the shoes of a historical world leader in order to build and progress their own civilization. There are multiple leaders and civilizations from which a player can pick and choose who he wants to role-play. The different 'civs' all have their unique abilities and

a unique building and unite that reflect the culture of that specific civilization. For example, a player can role-play Theodore Roosevelt as the leader of America and he will be granted: the special ability of *The Founding Fathers*, which entails that it lowers the time it takes to gain government bonuses, the special building *Film Studio* which grants a big cultural bonus in the modern era, and the special unit the *P-51 Mustang*, which is a special fighter aircraft. The goal of the game is to beat other civilizations in game by excelling in either: science, religion, culture or military power. Other civilizations that a player can choose from include Arabia, the Aztecs, Brazil, China, Egypt, England, France, Germany, Greece, India, Japan, Kongo, Norway, the Roman empire, Russia, Scythia, Spain and the Sumerians. Whenever I refer to a 'civilization' in this thesis I refer to those playable factions or nations listed above. *Civilization VI* is an ideal case study for analysing identification with foreign culture because it portrays many different cultures and it centres around symbolic cultural aspects in order to diversify these different cultures and make them competitive. The game asks the player to take the subject position of a world leader belonging to a possibly foreign culture and asks a player to choose whether and how they wish to promote, spread or change this culture; through important aspects such as world wonders and religion. It is also a similar strategy game as *Age of Mythology* which serves as the base interest of this research. Finally, *Civilization VI* is the ideal case study because it is a new game, released on October 20th 2016, in an older series of games that has warranted much academic attention.

With *Civilization VI* as a case study this research will analyse the potential of games in terms of identification with foreign cultures. In the hope that this thesis might serve as a stepping stone towards understanding how games could be able to improve cultural tensions in contemporary society by improving cultural understandings of foreign. De Mul stresses, when talking about games, that, "Insofar as they are ontological tools that shape our imaginations and enable us to construct new images of ourselves and the world, it is not easy to exaggerate their value in our lives" (2015, p. 181). Considering the importance de Mul describes, this research strives to help develop a better understanding of how games influence our imaginations through identification. The research question is:

How does *Civilization VI* facilitate player identification with foreign characters and nations?

In *Civilization VI* the player is asked to play as a specific nation and character, this character and nation belong to a certain culture. In extend, the research question also tries to answer how players identify with foreign cultures. As mentioned above identification is important because it helps shape a citizen's understanding of culture, but it is also important because identification determines how we view our self and how we view others. "Identification is crucial to the

socialization of children and the development of personal and social identities throughout the life cycle" (Cohen, 2001, p. 248). In part, Identification influences what kind of groups we want to belong to and how we differentiate with others. Thus, when a citizen manages to identify with a foreign culture this will shape its social position towards this culture, and might be a source of personal and social strength (Oetting & Beauvais, 1991). Hence, identification is a crucial concept for the aims of this thesis.

Structure

In chapter one I will focus on the theoretical framework. This framework will show which elements of identification are important to analyse in order to measure the level in which player experience identification whilst playing *Civilization VI*. The most important elements are the game narrative and the gamer interaction with the game. In chapter two I will explain how this theoretical concept can be operationalized in my methodology. I will also detail how I have conducted my participant ethnographic research and my auto-ethnographic research. Chapter three will give a more thorough explanation of *Civilization VI*. Here I will explain the workings of the game in detail. Following I will show the results of my autoethnography by analysing my own experiences playing *Civilization VI*. Chapter four will show the research results of the interviews and observations. In chapter five I will conclude my findings and give an answer to my central question as well as reflect on the limitations of this research and the possible implications for future research.

1. Theoretical framework

In this chapter I will explain the theoretical framework. Chapter one will start with an analysis of the term identification and the components of identification that are important in games. These components are the game narrative and player interaction. The game narrative will be analysed first, showing that five dimensions are crucial for measuring identification with a narrative. Following, the opposition between the narrative and interactional elements of games will be discussed. Afterwards, player interaction will be analysed, showing that a player's choices and a player's appropriation of game mechanics are crucial for measuring identification through game interaction. Finally, I will analyse the importance of subject positions, affordances and effectivities for identification in games. The affordances and effectivities determine whether or not a player is enticed to start playing a game.

1.1 Games & identification

As mentioned in the introduction, identification is connected with the reading of texts, but also with cultural values. Identification will be analysed as a process occurring while reading a certain text so as to focus on the mechanisms by which the text and identification influences its audience. Further research might look into the greater cultural context. Cohen argues that identification in media texts occurs by identifying with the narrative; with certain character of the text narrative (2001). A video game is not like most other media texts however. In a video game the player does not only 'read' the narrative of the video game but interacts with it, often influencing the pace or even the content of the game narrative (Mul, 2015). The process of identification in games is therefore fundamentally different from the process of identification in, for example, films. That being said, a game does have a narrative just as other media texts which can be analysed in terms of identification.

The game narrative can be more or less set in stone, in which case the player only has to unlock or unravel each part of the narrative as he or she progresses through the game. On the other hand, the game narrative can change its content and even ending, depending on the player's interaction with the game. This is also the case with *Civilization VI*. In *Civilization VI* the player can, for example, start a war or make peace, which will determine the entire further development of the game narrative. The game, in turn, responds to the player input by showing a cut scene that portrays the result of the player's choices. If a player for example starts a war with another civilization the game will show a cut scene of the world leader of this other civilization reacting upon the player's

declaration of war. These cut scenes are pre-designed and programmed short cinematics and help to create a game narrative. The example shows that the game also has an inherent game narrative portrayed by cut scenes which are triggered by the player, even though player interaction determines much of the game narrative and therefore influences the process of identification. In *Civilization VI* the player is also asked to role-play a certain character and nation whose characteristics are also set in stone. The characters and nations in the game are based on historical figures and societies and therefore tap into large pre-existing narratives; partly provided by the game and possibly partly provided by the player's own knowledge. The player has no influence on the narrative told by the role-played character or nation. It seems that identification with games is a twofold process. On the one hand, players experience identification with a game through the pre-designed text narrative, like with older forms of media texts. On the other hand, players also experience identification through interaction with the game, which influences the narrative.

Ludology versus narratology

The opposition between narrative and interaction, or sometimes referred to as 'play' (Mul, 2015; Voorhees, 2009), is not only crucial to analyse for the sake of identification, it has also created an academic opposition. In the field of game studies there is an academic opposition between the narratology and ludology approach when explaining the operations of games (Voorhees, 2009, p. 257). Many academics have spent time defining the medium of the video game which resulted in a debate in which the views of narratology and ludology oppose each other (Frasca, 2003). Narrativists are those academics that support the idea that games are closely linked to narrative or that games should be analysed through their narrative (Frasca, 2003). Academics that support the ludology side of the debate surrounding computer games claim that, because of their object of study, computer games studies are partially or even completely disconnected from other forms of inquiry into other cultural genres (Murray, 2005). Radical ludologists are opposed to game criticism that make any connections between games and other cultural forms such as films or paintings (2005). The radical ludologists maintain that the abstract interactional formal qualities of games are the only valuable objects for study in games. The archetypal game that most clearly symbolizes the ludologist's view of the computer game would be a game such as Tetris, unending, different gameplay for every game and with no apparent or important narrative elements (Murray, 2005). The argument can be made that because of their opposition against narratology, the ludologists have forced the debate and separation between narratology and ludology (Pearce, 2005). There are in fact many scholars that believe that the opposition is unfruitful and elements of both ludology and narratology coincide (Frasca, 2003; Murray, 2005; Pearce, 2005).

I wish to find out how games are able to transfer cultural knowledge so affectively that after years, I still remember the contents of the game *Age of Mythology*. The debate raised the question for me, as it does for others: are the key defining elements of games that captivate the gamers attention the ludology aspects or the narrative aspects? As I remembered *Age of Mythology* I surmised that the reason the culture depicted in the game was so effectively transferred to me must have something to do with the ludology aspects of the game. A player of *Age of Mythology* was bound to the cultural aspects because the player needed to base their strategy on the available deities in the game and because winning the game was depended on how well one could use their knowledge of all these gods. I agree with the ludologists that the key characteristic of a game is the interactive component and that this needs to be analysed (Murphy, 2004; Voorhees, 2009). At the same time, the reason I was enthralled by *Age of Mythology* must have been connected by both the game narrative and the narratives surrounding Norse, Egyptian and Greek mythology. As mentioned in the introduction, narratives are meaning making devices that give structure to the world and personal identities (Habermas, 2000; Jefferson, 2004). Games use the structuring power of narratives as well (Mul, 2015). The cultural knowledge I needed to possess to play the game effectively would not have been engaging or understandable if it were not connected to some larger narrative. It seems to me now that the narrative of the in-game story was the main driver for me to desire to continue playing and finish the game. I therefore do not wish to go into the debate between narratology and ludology, but follow Pearce, Frasca and Murray by bridging the gap between the two and investigate how narrative and ludology work together in games to captivate the game audience.

I follow de Mul in his belief that games have pre-established narratives, or pre-designed narrative frameworks, which are dependent on gamer interaction in order to unfold (2015, p. 173). I do not treat the game narrative and interaction as two opposing elements, but as two cooperative elements. Games are hybrid media texts consisting of interaction and narratives. Narratives are pre-designed and are therefore a standalone component of games to be analysed. The difference is that in games the standalone texts are often only small pieces that need to be connected by the player through his interaction with the game. This is also exemplified above with the example of *Civilization VI* highlighting its pre-designed cut scenes, characters and nations. A game narrative influences the process of identification through pre-designed game narratives and player interaction. It is important to look at both the identification that occurs through narratives and that occurs through player interaction because they constituted the entire game narrative together. Before going into the new interactive component of identification in games one must understand the basics of identification with media texts.

1.2 Narrative identification

Identification with media texts, as understood by Cohen, is an imaginative process occurring when a person sets his or her identity aside in order to experience a media text through the eyes of someone else (2001). Often, the someone else with whom the reader identifies is the protagonist in the story. This is especially true for games; a game is designed so as to make the player feel as if he is impersonating the protagonist of the game narrative. At the same time identification can also occur by differentiating oneself with other persons (Verhoeven, 2015), or by differentiating with other characters in the narrative. Cohen fails to touch upon this aspect of identification in his analysis. With this note in mind, Cohen's understanding of identification with a media text narrative does help to further the understanding of identification.

Cohen argues that the identification with media texts occurs through the identification with media characters. Consequently, Cohen defines character identification as "an imaginative process invoked as a response to characters presented within mediated texts" (p. 250). Identification then is a process that can occur when a reader, or gamer, is presented with a character in the media text and entails that the reader assumes the viewpoint of a media character. Due to identification, the unfolding of the narrative represented in the media text is experienced through the viewpoint of the media character a reader identifies with. The reader of the media text imagines himself to be the character he identifies with and subsequently experiences all events of the story through the eyes of the identified character. Identification in media texts therefore not only entails the imagining of being someone else, but also the imagining of acting and reacting as the identified character. In games this acting and reacting as the identified character is no longer imagined.

Because a reader lets go of their own beliefs, identification is a useful tool for persuasion (Cohen, 2001). Identification has the ability to overcome a person's natural tendencies of limiting one's beliefs to a single perspective because he or she is challenged to assume those of another. I do not believe that is inherent of identification to lose all self-awareness. I agree with Shaw that one identifies with a character which the player necessarily sees as separate from themselves (2013, p. 358). But I do not agree with Cohen that identifying with this separate other character does not entail some evaluation of the character and the self. The evaluation could for example take place after playing the game, or subconsciously. Instead I follow Appadurai, in the sense that I think identification is also concerned with defining yourself in the opposition with the other (2002). But perhaps the process of defining yourself in opposition to the other takes place after reading the text in for example a discussion with friends. I will elaborate more on my opposition with Cohen later when discussing the interactional component of games. I do agree with Cohen that identification

with a media text has the ability to overcome the natural tendencies of limiting your world view (2001). Not only because one is challenged to take up the views of another, but also because media text such as games allow one to explore identity outside of the highly politicized public sphere (Mc Guigan, 2005). A powerful tool, valuable in multicultural societies. Although I oppose Cohen in some ways, I seek to build on his view of identification in order to analyse narrative identification and strengthen his theory where it is lacking.

Five dimensions of narrative identification

When measuring the narrative part of identification, Cohen argues that four dimensions are crucial: empathy, understanding the character, sharing the goals of the character and loss of self-awareness (Cohen, 2001, p. 256). Empathy entails the sharing of feelings with the character. A player experiences empathy with a video character when he experiences feelings of being happy or sad corresponding with the fate of the narrative character. Empathy is measured in the level in which players experience the same or appropriate feelings corresponding with a video game character. Understanding the character refers to the sharing of the characters perspectives. Understanding of a character is thus measured by observing the level in which a player understands a character's view of the world; the level in which the player understands the motives of the character. The internalization of character goals refers to the appropriation of a character's motivation. The appropriation of motivation is then measured by examining the level in which players share goals with the game character. As mentioned, one element which Cohen overlooks in his four-dimension model is the differentiation with other characters. Differentiation with 'the other' is an important element of identification (Verhoeven, 2015, p. 6). By contrasting oneself with 'another' one also creates an identity. In a game, the differentiation with the 'other' could be visible through a player's differentiation with other players or other game characters, often referred to as computer players. In the case of *Civilization VI*, this would mean that a player can identify with his or her role-played nation by emphasizing the elements that differentiate his or her nation from others and by acting differently from other world leaders. This can be measured by observing the level in which the player appropriates the elements chosen by the designers to diversify the civilizations and world leaders, which for this research constitutes the fifth dimension of narrative identification.

Finally, identification in games is also linked to a game community and group identification that exists outside of the computer game (Looy, Courtois, Vocht, & Marez, 2012). For the focus of this thesis, being in what manner the game *Civilization VI* itself evokes identification with foreign cultures, the interest lies in the potential of the game itself and not its surrounding community or culture. Although online multiplayer gaming and gamer communities are a big part of gamer

identities, researching them is not central to the question of this thesis. This thesis aims to make clear in what manner the game *Civilization VI* itself evokes identification and not its fan base. Therefore, group identification and community identity in games lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, online player interaction also lies beyond the scope of this research. Participants will therefore be first-time players of the game and only play with computer opponents. This means that a player can still experience identification through diversifying himself from other computer players. Which brings us back to the uniqueness of games and the second component of identification in games: player interaction.

1.3 The relation between narrative and interactive identification

Game interaction is the point where the traditional understanding of media text identification is no longer sufficient. For Cohen identification has no interaction, "identification lacks an interactional component because when identifying, one lacks an awareness of the self, and, therefore, the distinction between self and other—necessary for interaction—is missing" (2001, p. 253). I believe this is where Cohen is short-sighted because of two reasons. The first is the already mentioned and overlooked aspect of identification: diversification with others (Verhoeven, 2015). Above Cohen states that in the process of identification 'the distinction between the self and other is missing'. But, even when a reader identifies with a media character and loses his or her self-awareness completely, this reader still diversifies his identified character with other characters.

Secondly in games, identification occurs in spite of and through gamer interaction. Cohens understanding of identification might be true for a person interacting with media texts such as novels or films, but in games the player is expected to interact with the narrative and often the other characters. A gamer interacts with the game through the use of a mouse or joystick and views the results of his interaction via the video screen, thus a player receives feedback. Playing a game involves a sort of interactional self-observation build on continuous feedback on the screen (Mul, 2015, p. 172). If a distinction between the self and the other is necessary for game interaction, then games cannot provoke a process of identification in which the player completely loses their own point of view as Cohen argues. Nevertheless, whilst playing games I have often experienced that I questioned myself what to do, being the leader of a Greek settlement. I did not question what I would do myself per se. Through playing games gamers do experience the process of imagining oneself to be another. The difference is that a player has to go beyond imagining and act as the identified character to progress further in the game. Somehow the process of identification with the media text narrative is facilitated in games in spite of the interactional component. Identification in games seems to be different from the process of completely letting oneself go to assume the role of

the identified character. In games players interact with the game which includes a differentiation between the self and the other. This differentiation between the actions a player takes whilst playing games and those perceived on the screen, those actions of the other, did not negate the process of identification the player experiences with the video characters. De Mul argues that this distinction of a "point of action" and a "point of view", which refers to the joystick or mouse input component and the video screen feedback component that together form the structure of interaction in games, allows the player to reflect upon the self as another (2015, p. 172). By differentiating the player input, consisting sometimes of simple mouse clicks, with the actions on screen, sometimes consisting of the swing of a sword or the building of monuments, a player can imagine oneself being another and his or her actions being those of another.

Interaction in games therefore does not necessarily hinder identification by an inherent diversification between the player who clicks and the perceived actions of the game character on the screen. A well-constructed game will make the player feel as if he is the one performing the actions on the screen, whereby the interaction only facilitates the identification. A player can experience acting as the identified character by using the game mechanics. Identification in games can then also be defined as the imaginative process of being another invoked by the interaction with video games. Therefore, the interactional component in video games does not negate the identification with a media text character as Cohen suggests. In games players can identify with narratives as audiences can with other forms of media texts, despite the interactive component. Only, in games the identification process is influenced by the interaction of the player which involves a part of the player's self in the identification process.

Narratives in games thus consist of pre-designed characters, nations and cinematics and texts that are triggered by the actions of gamers. In the narrative sequences player identification is stimulated through visual and audio designs (Murphy, 2004). Because these narrative sequences are often apart from gamer interaction it is possible that the narrative sequences produce a bit of a different story than the player produces through his narrative interactions (2004). For example, a player constructs a narrative of conquest through repeated actions of war against another player. The player then triggers a narrative sequence in which the identified character is portrayed as a very gentle person. This narrative of a gentle person might contradict the narrative the player has constructed for his character through his interaction. The narrative and the player interaction therefore influence one another and are not as separated as might be suggested here. Nevertheless, the narrative of the game and the player interaction with the game are fundamentally different, existing of different elements and must therefore both be analysed differently; without losing sight

of their interrelatedness. De Mul argues that narratives and gamer interaction both express elements of human life and thereby give a structured representation of a human's lived experiences (Mul, 2015, p. 177). By giving structure to human life and experiences, narratives and game interaction both enable reflective identification with these structures (p. 177). In 1.2, the theory for measuring narrative identification are given, let us now continue with the theory for measuring interactive identification.

1.4 Interactive identification

Interaction in games can be understood as the player's ability to interact with the game's representations in a meaningful way (Mul, 2015, p. 174), the gamer can influence the progress of the game. In games the interaction between the player and the game is mainly cognitive according to Voorhees, because the body only interacts through the clicking of the mouse (2009). Especially for turn-based strategy games such as *Civilization VI* (p. 263); no special physical skills are needed. The player of these games mainly thinks about the proper course of action and then enacts it. The choices a player makes whilst playing a game are based upon the representation of reality in the game (Mul, 2015).

De Mul makes a division of player interaction in three stages which is very helpful in understanding how game interaction is based on real life. De Mul calls these three stages of player interactions play1, play2 and play3 (2015, p. 177). The element of play1 refers to the interaction or 'play' of everyday life. According to de Mul all life is influenced by elements of play, and games are imitations of the play that can be found in real life. The possible actions in games are all based on existing actions in real life. In a sense, children's games such as playing doctor or soldier, 'trying on' a different identity as play, are not so different from computer games. It seems that games are becoming one of the main suppliers of these important 'play' opportunities (Lauwaert, 2009, p. 6). The imitation or representation of play from real life in computer games is the element of play2. Central here are the sets of rules that a game applies to the representation of play in everyday life. The representation of play in life and the game rules together create a playing field or space of possible action in which all gamer interaction takes place. A game represents a certain world and fills it with symbolical meaning and a set of rules dictates how a player can interact with this world. For example, imagine a game with a 2D depiction of a certain world, modelled after ancient Egypt, in which the rules dictate that the player can only move forwards, backwards and jump to explore pyramids. Together these elements form the playing field of this hypothetical game. The actions: move forwards, backwards and jumping and many elements of the Egyptian world are based on real life equivalents, although this 2D world might not be a lifelike representation. The player can

recognize the representations of real life elements, and by recognizing and internalizing the elements the player will know how to play the game, how to make use of the playing field and how to interpret the game world. The player recognizes that the character can jump because he recognizes jumping form real life. This is the final element play3, the identification of gamers with the playing field or the possible space of action.

Considering this strain of thought, player interaction with games is in part the recognition and mimicking of everyday life play and in part the appropriation of the game rules and mechanics, together they influence the identification process of players. This suggests that interactive identification is twofold itself, consisting of the appropriation of the game mechanics and player choices that mimic the play of everyday life. De Mul does not necessarily differentiate between the appropriation of the game mechanics and player choices that mimic play from everyday life, but considers them more part of the whole process of identification in games. Appropriating the game mechanics and playing field however does not necessarily constitute only one way for a player to interact with a game. Gamers have often played games in ways completely contradictory to the design, winning the game nonetheless; this shows that not only the intended or designed mode of play might shape the game narrative, player interaction itself might change the game narrative in unexpected ways. Players can operate in the periphery of play, in the boundaries of what is possible to do with a game in ways unintended by the designers of the game (Lauwaert, 2009, p. 12). Therefore, it is necessary to analyse both the player appropriation of the game mechanics and the player choices that further the game. Especially for the game *Civilization VI* in which the player is challenged to find his own way of playing and winning the game.

Player choices

Let us begin with player choices. The choices that a player makes must affect the game's narrative and outcome, otherwise there is no reason for playing the game. The gamer interacts with the game by influencing the narrative through his choices. According to the understanding of identification as the process of taking a character's perspective, a gamer that identifies with a character should make choices from the perspective of the identified character (Cohen, 2001). Combining this with de Mul's understanding of play1 to 3, the choices a player makes do not only reflect the identified characters choices but also the play from everyday life. Therefore, when a player identifies with a character or culture in the game, he or she is expected to make choices that correspond with the expected choices of that character or culture, mimicking the play known from everyday life.

For example, in *Civilization VI* a player has the option to play as Cleopatra of Egypt. When playing as Cleopatra of Egypt there is a logical or expected course of action, provided by historical and cultural knowledge, the design of the game and its representation of play in everyday life. The expected courses of action for Cleopatra would be, to name a few, to build the pyramids, focus on trading and establishing good relations with other big power world leaders. Nevertheless, the player has the freedom to choose to do none of these actions, neither are the aforementioned actions necessary for winning the game, although they do play on the strengths of Egypt as a civilization in the game. The player is free to choose whether he wishes to play in a manner reflective of what Cleopatra of Egypt might do, reflective of the intended game design, or in a manner closer to their own preferences, possibly in the periphery of play.

It is necessary to look at the concordance between a player's choices of actions and the expected actions of a character or culture in order to analyse whether player interactions enforce player identification. As noted above, the choices that a gamer makes are based upon the way the game represents structures from real life, or play in everyday life. Consequently, in order to measure in what manner player choices further a player's identification with a game character and culture, one must measure the level to which player choices mimic the logical play of real or historical life of the identified character and culture.

Game mechanics

The next element that influences the identification of a player with a game character is the appropriation of the game mechanics. As explained by de Mul, a gamer is submerged into a game when he successfully appropriates the game mechanics, the play3 step (2015, p. 177). The player loses his or her self-awareness and is transported into the world of the game most effectively when the player understands the possibilities within the playing field. When a player understands the controls of the game and has made them his or her own, playing the game becomes an effortless process, almost automatic. Playing a game starts with an interaction based on trial and error, in which a person is very aware of his interaction with the mouse and the game settings and in which a player tries to appropriate the game mechanics. Playing a game ends in a state of submersion in which the player is only aware of his action as a character in the game, if the game mechanics are well designed.

Murphy states that, in terms of identification, game controls should feel intuitive for the player to immerse him or her in the game (Murphy, 2004, p. 231). If the rules and controls of a game feel logical to the player, then the identification is increased (p. 231). If a gamer has successfully

appropriated the game mechanics, then playing the game should feel like a logical, almost automated process. A dissonance between the actions a player can perform and the actions a player thinks the character is able to perform will interrupt the flow of the game (Shaw, 2013, p. 357). The flow of a game is the level of absorption in the game, a state in which nothing but the game seems to matter (p. 357). For example, when a player understands exactly what 'in game' distance his character can jump when the player presses the spacebar, he becomes submerged in the game knowing exactly when and where to use the spacebar control. When the player believes his character should be able to perform a jump action following his logical interpretation of the character and the controls, but for some reason, the game does not allow for the jump action to be completed satisfactorily, the gamer is pulled out of his experience in frustration. This frustration interrupts the flow of the game and can negatively influence the process of identification (p. 357).

This also corresponds with my experience playing games. When I have acquainted myself with the game rules and have tested and understood the game mechanics, I become unaware of the actions I need to perform in order to play the game. I do not realize that I am moving and clicking with the mouse, I am only aware of the consequences these movements and clicks have 'in game' or 'on screen'. The better that these mechanics work, the more I feel immersed in the game. When I sometimes miss click or when the game mechanics seem to disagree with my commands, I am re-emerged temporarily in real life and often feel frustrated. Gamers often experience that a game character doesn't perform the desired action they tried to establish with their input. Somewhere something goes wrong in the process of appropriating the game mechanics resulting in frustration. When a player cannot appropriate the game rules and mechanics, it will become very hard for this player to experience a process of identification with the game character and narrative. Gamers are prone to abandon the game altogether. The appropriation of game mechanics can be found in the understanding of the game rules and the intuitive and logical feel of the game mechanics. The appropriation of the game mechanics is successful when a gamer is unaware of his bodily actions needed to perform 'in game' actions and does not experience moments of frustration caused by misappropriation.

1.5 Affordance & effectivities

Finally, there is one more element that is central in a player's choice of playing a game and a player's preparedness of identifying with the game protagonist; the affordances of a game. According to Yates & Littleton the presentation of a game creates a certain expectation of the kind of players that are suited to play these games (Yates & Littleton, 1999, p. 570). For example, a game such as *Gears of War*, in which the player is asked to take the subject position of a hardened male soldier whose

whole attire suggest he is the toughest around, already emanates the idea that the players of this game might be players who like to play war- and violent games. Through the representation of a game in commercial products and the representation in the game itself a certain narrative is created that suggests what kind of players are ideal to fill the subject position of the player of this game, this might affect what kind of gender, ethnicity or class the game is catered to. The elements that together form this image of the ideal gamer are called the affordances (p. 571). A player reads these affordances and determines what kind of skills and requirements he can meet in order to play this game. For example, a little girl that recognizes the imagery of colourful animals in the game *Fifa Piñata* from the television series and the accompanying children's approach of the commercial might feel reasonably confident that she is an intended player of this game. The little girl can bring her knowledge and enjoyment of the television series to bear in playing the video game. The abilities a gamer can contribute to playing a game are called the effectivities (p. 570). Games are designed to expect a certain kind of player and a certain kind of gameplay (Lauwaert, 2009, p. 331).

When an actor interacts with some 'system' [for example a game] the conditions that enable the interaction include properties of both the actor and the system. Interaction can be seen to have two important elements. First, the contributing properties of the system and overall environment which provides the 'affordances' (Yates & Littleton, 1999, p. 570). The properties partially overlap with the game mechanics or playing field (Mul, 2015). Second, the actor's contributed 'abilities' or 'effectivities' that allows him or her to make use of the available affordances (Yates & Littleton, 1999, p. 570). The affordances and the game mechanics or playing field overlap quite a bit, the difference is that the playing field is only concerned with showing the parameters of the game and the appropriate way of playing the game, whereas the affordances show what 'kind' of player the game hopes to reach.

The preparedness of the gamer to begin the appropriation of the game mechanics and rules, and consequently the gamer preparedness to identify with the game, is also dependent on the perceived affordances and effectivities of the game. In this thesis however, I will not be analysing any marketing campaigns of *Civilization VI* and therefore will not sketch a complete overview of the affordances this game asks of gamers. This thesis cannot incorporate an analysis of all the affordances that influence the willingness of players of different genders, ethnicities or classes to engage with a game. The overall affordances are interesting to research to determine what kind of players are invited or likely to play this game, which is not a question I seek to answer. This research is only interested with the interaction between gamer and game and not between gamer, commercial, society etc. Nevertheless, the affordances portrayed in the game mechanics are a part

of the interaction with the game and therefore also have the potential of influencing the process of identification. In *Civilization VI* many different world leaders and civilizations are playable factions, all with their own affordances being for example: male, female, peaceful, warmonger, trader, etc. These affordances are part of the appropriation of the representation and rules of the game and a part of the identification with the represented media character or nation. The affordances might stimulate a certain behaviour, the use of certain effectivities of a gamer. Therefore, the affordances elements will only be analysed from the perspective of the player and their willingness to engage with the game. Important to note is that the designed and expected modes of play and players are often only a starting point of approaching the game. Many players go beyond the expected mode of interaction with a game where this is possible (Lauwaert, 2009, p. 332).

1.6 Conclusion

As noted above, identification in games is a two-fold process consisting of narrative identification and interactive identification. The level in which a player experiences narrative identification can be analysed through the four dimension Cohen mentioned, empathy, understanding the character, sharing the goals of the character and loss of self-awareness (2001, p. 256), and the fifth, differentiation with others, supplied by Verhoeven (2015, p. 6). Interactive identification itself is two-fold, existing of player choices and the appropriation of game mechanics. The level in which player choices facilitate identification can be measured by observing in what manner player choices represent the logical or expected actions of the role-played world leader, based upon historical knowledge and the play of everyday life. The level in which game mechanics facilitate identification is measured by analysing whether the player feels that the controls are intuitive and by analysing the player's understanding of the playing field. Finally, in choosing to play the game and choosing a certain civilization and world leader to role play, the player reads certain affordances and brings certain effectivities into the interaction with the game which influence the preparedness of the gamer to identify with the game.

2. Methodology

In this chapter I will operationalize my theoretical framework and present he methodology used for this auto-ethnographic research. The operationalization will show how identification with the game narrative and through gamer interaction will be measured. The auto-ethnographic research is twofold. The first part of the research will detail my personal experiences of playing *Civilization VI* and in what manner I personally have experienced identification with the game. The second part of the research is a participant research which will put my own experiences in a broader social context. The participant research will not only exist of interviews with players of the game *Civilization VI* but also of observations made whilst the interviewees were playing the game. In part, the player might be oblivious to the motivations of his choices and how they might have furthered identification, because he or she has lost his or her self-awareness. In order to try and circumvent these problems the interviews will be accompanied by preliminary observations, whose information might be used during the interviews to ask more specific questions.

2.1 Operationalization

Narrative identification

As mentioned above the identification process in games depends on the identification with the narrative and the interaction of the gamer, which consists of the appropriation of game rules and mechanics and a player's choices. To analyse the identification process in games the components of game identification must all be considered. Starting with the identification with the narrative. Cohen has supplied his theory of the four dimensions of narrative identification including: Empathy, understanding the character, sharing the goals of the character and loss of self-awareness (2001, p. 256). In order to measure these four dimensions of narrative identification for a reader of a media text, Cohen has supplied a question list, which forms the basis for my own questions. In order to use these questions for this research some adjustments must be made to make the questions fit the game medium and the specific requirements of *Civilization VI*. In games the gamer does not only view actions, he performs them (Murphy, 2004; Mul, 2015; Voorhees, 2009), this asks for a few alterations in the questions.

The role-played world leader in *Civilization VI* is not portrayed often in the game. The world leaders from other civilizations are portrayed more frequently, and these direct their speeches towards the player, as if the player is the not portrayed world leader. Therefore, less attention

should be awarded to the portrayal of character X in Cohen's questioning. Because the role-played character is not portrayed very often the actual interpretation this character might make of the game events is not clearly given. Nonetheless, because these characters represent world leaders and the game actions revolve around their civilizations the gamer has a certain expectation of the characters reaction upon the game events. As explained above, based on the game design and elements from real or historic life, the player has an idea of what his role-played world leader might do. The questions should refer to the level in which gamer feelings and reactions correspond with this expectation. Another important element of identification is the opposition with other characters (Verhoeven, 2015). Because the opposition world leaders in *Civilization VI* are portrayed often in the game, the opposition with them is another important element that needs to be questioned.

Considering the issues above, I propose to use the following list of questions to investigate whether players experience identification with the game narratives and character:

1. While playing *Civilization VI*, I felt as if I was part of the action.
2. While playing *Civilization VI,* I forgot myself and was fully absorbed.
3. I was able to understand the events in the game in a manner similar to that in which the role-played character would have understood them.
4. I think I have a good understanding of my role-played character.
5. I tend to understand the reasons why my role-played character might act a certain way in the given scenarios.
6. While playing the game I could feel emotions that correspond to the emotion my role-played character might have.
7. While playing the game, I felt I was inside the head of my role-played character.
8. On important moments in the game, I felt like I acted as my role-played character.
9. On important moments in the game, I felt like I knew what my role-played character might go through.
10. While playing the game, I wanted to achieve the goals of my role-played character.
11. When my role-played character succeeded I felt joy, when my role-played character failed I felt sad.
12. While playing the game, I felt I was different from the other world leaders in the game
13. I tried to act differently than other civilizations in the game.
14. While playing the game, I tried to enforce the elements that differentiate my role-payed character from other characters.

Interactive identification

Continuing, the analysis must also look at the gamer interaction. Gamer interaction consists of two important elements, player choices and the appropriation of the playing field or game mechanics. Beginning with player choices, it is noted that interaction is structured upon the representations of play from real life (Mul, 2015). Additionally, Cohen showed that when identification takes place a player makes choices as if being the role-played character (2001). By combining these theories, it becomes clear that when player choices correspond with the logical or expected choices of the role-played character, the player strengthens his process of identification. These choices are off course connected to the identification with the game narrative. Questions such as: I tend to understand the reasons why my role-played character might act a certain way in the given scenarios, already touch upon and overlap with the topic of player choices corresponding to the expected behaviour of world leaders. Nevertheless, the choices a player makes can also be separated from the narrative sequences and still further the game narrative and the process of identification. To measure the level in which player choices influence player identification in the interview, the following questions will be asked:

1. While playing *Civilization VI,* I tried to act as the world leader I role played might do.
2. While playing *Civilization VI,* did you base your choices upon what corresponded with your own personal feelings and thoughts, those corresponding to your own personality, or those closer to the personality of your role-played character?
3. While playing *Civilization VI,* I tried to exploit the strengths of my civilization.
4. While playing *Civilization VI,* I tried to build my civilization in accordance with historical knowledge.
5. I tried to win *Civilization VI* by focusing on the unique elements of my civilization.
6. In terms of a choice of religion, the acquisition of great people, building world wonders, military prowess etc. I tried to make the choices that logically corresponded with my role-played civilization.

To continue it is necessary to look at the appropriation of the playing field. As de Mul and Murphy have stated, the appropriation of the game mechanics should result in an intuitive and logical mode of playing in which the game becomes oblivious of his actual bodily interaction with the computer game, or system (2015; 2004). The following questions will be asked in order to measure the appropriation of the game mechanics and the playing field:

1. I understood the controls and workings of *Civilization VI.*

2. I experienced no problems in enforcing my plans through the game mechanics.

3. The game controls seemed logical to me.

4. While playing *Civilization VI*, I felt unaware of the acts I needed to perform in order to play the game.

5. While playing *Civilization VI*, I felt as if I was performing the acts portrayed on screen.

Affordances & effectivities

Finally, this research will look at those parts of the game mechanics that created certain affordances and asked certain effectivities of the player. These affordances are connected to the available nations and role playable characters in the game, but also the appearance of the game itself. When players feel that their effectivities correspond to the affordances of the game their preparedness to experience identification with the game is greater. The following questions will be asked in order to measure the affordances and effectivities for *Civilization VI*:

1. I feel like I am capable of playing *Civilization VI*.

2. I feel like I am an intended player of *Civilization VI*.

3. The portrayal of the game appealed to me.

4. The goals and workings of the game appealed to me.

5. The playable characters in the game appealed to me.

2.2 Methodology

Autoethnography

The autoethnography will take the shape of an analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006). This form of autoethnography is more academic and analytical in nature and less concerned with narrating personal sensibilities as for example evocative autoethnography is (Anderson, 2006, p. 374; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Analytic autoethnography refers to a research in which the "researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena" (p. 373).

I have chosen to perform an analytic autoethnography because it has five key features that benefit the research (p. 378). The first is that the researcher is a complete member of the social world that is being studied. Second is that the researcher possesses analytic reflexivity. Analytic reflexivity in this context refers to the fact that the researcher's self-conscious introspection is enhanced by a desire to understand oneself and others by examining one's actions and perceptions in comparison with those of others. The researcher has both the knowledge of a participants

experiences and the keen eye for the relevant details belonging to the informed researcher. Third is the visibility of the active researcher in the text. In other research the character and nature of a researcher is often hidden from the text, leaving the reader to guess at the motivations and influence of the researcher. In an auto-ethnographic research the motivations and character of the researcher are revealed. The fourth feature is the dialogue with informants beyond the self. The researcher avoids the pitfall of self-absorption by contrasting his own findings with the experiences of significant others. Furthermore, because the researcher is a participant himself he can engage in a deeper dialogue with other participants, often aided by the mutual trust and understanding which belonging to the same social group generates. The final feature is the commitment to an analytic agenda. The analytic autoethnographer is not simply concerned with documenting his own life or experiences but with providing the empirical data that can be used for a better understanding of a sociocultural phenomenon. Analytic-interpretive writing enables me to combine the socio-cultural theories with my analysis observations striving for a more academic result (Chang, 2013).

Whilst participating, or playing the game, I will make field notes which will help in narrating my experience as truthful as possible (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 750). A researcher must be wary that making notes might prevent him from fully participating and that participating fully might prevent him from taking field notes (Anderson, 2006, p. 389). In order to prevent this from happening I will both participate completely and make notes after the experience as well as participate whilst making notes.

Observations and interviews

The observation and interview research has been conducted with five participants and serves to strengthen the autoethnography. The participants consisted of three women and two men, between the ages of 22 and 26. I have chosen to conduct the research with these participants because of several reasons. First, considering my own auto-ethnographic research, they provide an equal balance between male and female participants. I have balanced the amount of male and female participants in the hope to provide a research with generally applicable results. Second, I have chosen participants around the same age and with a similar academic background as myself so that the research results will not differ because of completely different backgrounds. This will make the comparison between my experiences and those of the participants more focused on the differences in game experience. Analysing how different social groups might react on the game lies beyond the scope of this research. Furthermore, considering the intricate working of *Civilization VI*, these participants could be considered as belonging to the target audience for the game. I have also chosen to use participants that are first time players of the game *Civilization VI*. I have done this because I

myself was a first-time player of the game but also because I am interested in the experience of players not belonging to game communities because this lies beyond the scope of this research. Finally, the selection of participants was off course also limited by selecting those who were willing and able to comply with the research demands.

I have conducted the observations and interviews in my room where I set up the game for the participants, making the external conditions for every participant completely the same. I asked them to pick a civilization which did not belong to their culture but instead to a culture which they considered to be a foreign culture. By doing so I ensured that every participant plays the game with a culture they consider to be foreign. Continuing, I asked participants to play the game for four hours. My own experience with the game has shown me that after four hours of playing the player has surpassed the initial stage of the game and has started developing characteristics for their civilization. The player will presumably have chosen in which way he wants to specialize his civilization in four hours of playing. These choices might be important for the relevance of this research. In an ideal situation, the gamers would have completely finished one game, but the time investment needed for such a research lies beyond the limitations of this research. Participants therefore played the game for four hours during which time I observed them and made field notes. The 'save games', the in game documented progress made by a player, normally used to continue playing the game later, are also kept as potential reference points for the observations and interviews.

The interviews lasted between 18 and 35 minutes. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. I have conducted the interviews based upon the questions provided by the theoretical framework. Whenever I felt it necessary to divert from these questions in order to further pursue interesting and valuable information I have done so. The participants have received pseudonyms in order to preserve their anonymity. Quotes from the transcriptions are used where relevant in order to pertain the voice of the participants.

I have chosen to interview friends because an ethnographic research tries to investigate a person and its surrounding. Since my autoethnographic research is considered with me and my surrounding I chose to interview participants from my surrounding. Instead of circumventing biases I wish to make them abundantly clears so that the reader might understand the entire process and make his own judgement. Furthermore, because I have a relationship of confidence with them, I believe I was able to go into a deeper and more open conversation than I would have been able to with strangers. Allowing the research to be more thorough without the necessary time investment needed to establish a relationship with participants.

2.3 Conclusion

Following the theoretical framework, the methodology exists of interviews that will follow list of thirty questions based upon the aspects of narrative identification, interactive identification and the affordances and effectivities of *Civilization VI*. A player might not be aware of all the motivations behind his game choices because he might have been submerged completely in the game. Therefore, the research will be enforced with observations made whilst the interviewees are playing the game. These observations will be focused on the same points as the interviews. Furthermore, an analytic autoethnographic research will be done to detail my own experience playing the game.

3. Autoethnography

In order to make the autoethnography as complete as possible I strive in this chapter to describe the experience of playing *Civilization VI* as complete as possible. I will first detail what it is like to play the game *Civilization VI* and how the game works in general. Continuing I will problematize *Civilization* to detail the academic discussion surrounding *Civilization*. Finally, I will detail my personal experience playing *Civilization VI* as the Arabian and Egyptian empire.

> "Originally created by legendary game designer Sid Meier, Civilization is a turn-based strategy game in which you attempt to build an empire to stand the test of time. Become ruler of the world by establishing and leading a civilization from the stone age to the information age. wage war, conduct diplomacy, advance your culture, and go head-to-head with history's greatest leaders as you attempt to build the greatest civilization the world has ever known. Civilization VI offers new ways to engage with your world: cities now physically expand across the map, active research in technology and culture unlocks new potential, and competing leaders will pursue their own agendas based on their historical traits as you race for one of five ways to achieve victory in the game." (Civilization corporation, 2017)

The quote above is the introduction to *Civilization VI* written by the game developers. The wording of the introductory, such as "award-winning", "legendary", "build an empire to stand the test of time" and "greatest the world has ever known", shows the epic tone that underlies the game and its goals. The game's cinematic introductory, the music in the game, the title pages before starting the game and the in-game texts and commentaries all enforce the 'epic-ness' of the game, the feeling that you embark on an epic quest to build a civilization and to persevere above all others. In this chapter I will detail the representation and mechanisms of *Civilization VI* in order to fully understand the turn-based strategy game. First, the workings of *Civilization VI* will be explained. Second, relevant academic discussions concerning *Civilization* will be examined.

3.1 Playing Civilization in general

Civilization VI is a turn based strategy game. This means that the gamer is expected to make strategic decisions but has an unlimited amount of time to consider these decisions. Every turn the player can move and perform actions with all of his units once and make other important decisions for his cities, diplomacy, research and government. When the player has made all his decisions he presses the end

turn button which will start the turns for the other civilizations, city-states and the barbarians. After a while all other computer or human players will have made their decisions and their moves and the player can start a new turn and make new decisions. From the beginning until someone wins the game the player progresses by choosing what he wants to do with his units, research, etc., in every turn. Furthermore, the player's progress from the stone age to the information age through researching technologies.

When playing *Civilization VI* you start out with a settler and a warrior unit on a small piece of land. The rest of the 'map', the digital space of the game world, is still hidden from sight. The locations of city states and the geography of the map is randomly generated. No geographical historic accuracy is evident in the map of the game. The first actions and choices of the player are concerned with where he wants to build his first city with his settler unit and where he wants to move his warrior unit. Respectively this can be done by clicking the mouse twice. The player wants to settle his city as fast as possible because once his city is settled he will start earning science, culture, money and respectively religion. On the other hand, choosing the right location is of crucial importance. The player wants to have connection to fresh water, almost always a river, in order to get more housing for his citizens and preferably also the option to attain some bonus, strategic and luxury resources which are spread out over the map. Finally, in choosing where to settle his first city the player can also take into consideration the special abilities of his civilization. The example of the beginning of the game shows how in *Civilization* two simple mouse click choices can entail a broad spectrum of important considerations.

When the first city is settled and the warriors have moved to a new space, the player has to choose what he wants to produce in his city. The city automatically acquires some science, wealth etc., but it can also produce specific units, buildings, wonders or districts over the time of a number of game turns. In the beginning the choices are a little more limited but they have far reaching implications. When the player has made his or her choice, he or she can end the turn and wait until the units can move again in the second turn, only to repeat itself until he or she has more options to make decisions, and finally until someone wins the game.

From beginning the game until victory or defeat I can roughly discerns three stages in the progress of the game based on my own repeated experiences with the game. The beginning stage of the game is mainly centred around exploration of the map and potentially fighting off any barbarian threats. Uncovering other players, friendly tribes and city states can grant the player all kinds of boosts. The tribal villages are spread-out over the map which give the players free gifts such as boosting knowledge, a free unit or free gold. Exploring is also essential for discovering the perfect

location for a second city. As cities grow and the player progresses his or her technology tree and the civics tree, new units and buildings will become available to him for production. The progress in the civics tree will also enable the player to choose from new and different forms of government, going for example from a chiefdom to a democracy. All forms of government have their own special bonuses and can provide policies that help develop a civilization. Eventually a player can produce another settler to settle a new city and increase his capacity to produce units and buildings and his output in science culture, etc.

Gradually the player will move from the beginning stage to the second stage in which the player can start to give a clearer direction to his civilization. *Civilization* can be won not only through military conquest but also through spreading religion, achieving great scientific progress or creating a globally dominant culture. In the second stage of the game the player gradually attains more and more freedom as his production options expand. The player will have to choose what kind of direction he or she wants to give to his or her civilization. A player could start producing specific wonders and buildings to progress culture, science or wealth, or he or she could start building up an army. Amongst the building options are specialty districts which focus on culture, religion, science, wealth, happiness, housing or military. A player can choose which of these he wants to build, and which first, in accordance with his plans.

In the second stage, through the technology and civics tree, the districts become available to the player. Districts and other specialties in the game also grant great person points with which the player can earn 'great people'. The great people can be great scientists, prophets, musicians, engineers, etc. Every single great person has unique bonuses and helps to further develop a player's civilization. The great prophet can be used to found a religion. There are only a limited number of great prophets in the game and players have to compete in raising points to earn these great prophets or other great people. The religions that a player can found can be historically accurate or completely custom religions. But only one of each religion and each attribute is available in the game. The players also have to compete for the production of world wonders. Every world wonder in the game can only be built once by one player. The example of the great people, religions and wonders shows how the game emphasizes the need to be quick in developing your civilization. The player has to continuously choose what to focus on, neglecting other options in favour of quickly achieving specific goals. Although the turn based set up of the game gives the player time to think about his choices, there is always a perpetual feeling of haste to the game.

In the third and final stage diplomacy becomes more important and players will start to compete more for the bonuses provided by city states. As civilizations start to get close to their own

victory conditions they often start to focus even more on their specific plans. Some might become more involved with other players through a heavy focus on conquest while others might become less involved with other players by focusing heavily on science. Eventually a player will achieve one of the four victory conditions or after 500 turns the player with the highest score, based on all aspects of the civilizations, will win. Wars between players occur frequently throughout all the stages of the game.

3.2 Problematizing Civilization

Civilization games are based upon historical knowledge and consist of an incredible amount of detailed historical facts (Uricchio, 2005, p. 327). However, the representation of the game is often not completely historical or culturally. The game map is not geographical but random and players can decide for themselves how they progress through scientific discoveries. In this sense, the argument can be made that *Civilization* turns history into mathematical codes which don't value the essence of historical truth but the gameplay mechanics (Galloway A. R., 2006, p. 102). This raises the question how any correct understanding of history, and in effect of cultures, can be gained from playing such games. On the other hand, every account of history can be considered an interpretation of historical facts and *Civilization* is not very unlike other historical accounts in this regard (Chapman, 2013, p. 315). Chapman believes that, like other accounts of history, *Civilization* is simply another way of constituting the past. History is always a portion of the truth, a "reductive exercise of capturing the evidence of the past" (p. 323) and making a transcoded narrative of it in accordance with the semiotic structure of the medium, history in games is no different.

Chapman also believes that *Civilization* offers the unique ability of playing with the "pas-*as*-history" (p. 317). The interactional character of the game gives the player a unique ability to engage with narratives about the past in a more profound way, often resulting in a better understanding of the historical process (2013). This is because the players do not only interact with the history represented in the game, but they contrast the game history with the larger historical discourse to which it relates. *Civilization* is based upon historical knowledge and events but it is not limited to their specificity of occurrence, allowing the player to engage in a playful interaction with historical narratives, testing the impact of decisions (Uricchio, 2005, p. 330). The playful historical narratives of games therefore do provide players the ability to engage with history and subsequently historical knowledge of cultures. Furthermore, this playful interaction seems to be even more meaningful than classic interaction with book narratives because of the player's autonomy to test history. *Civilization* is not about duplicating history, but supplying the tools and elements of history that will allow the

player to experience what would happen if they take over, along the way learning potentially more about the historical process than a historically correct account of history might provide.
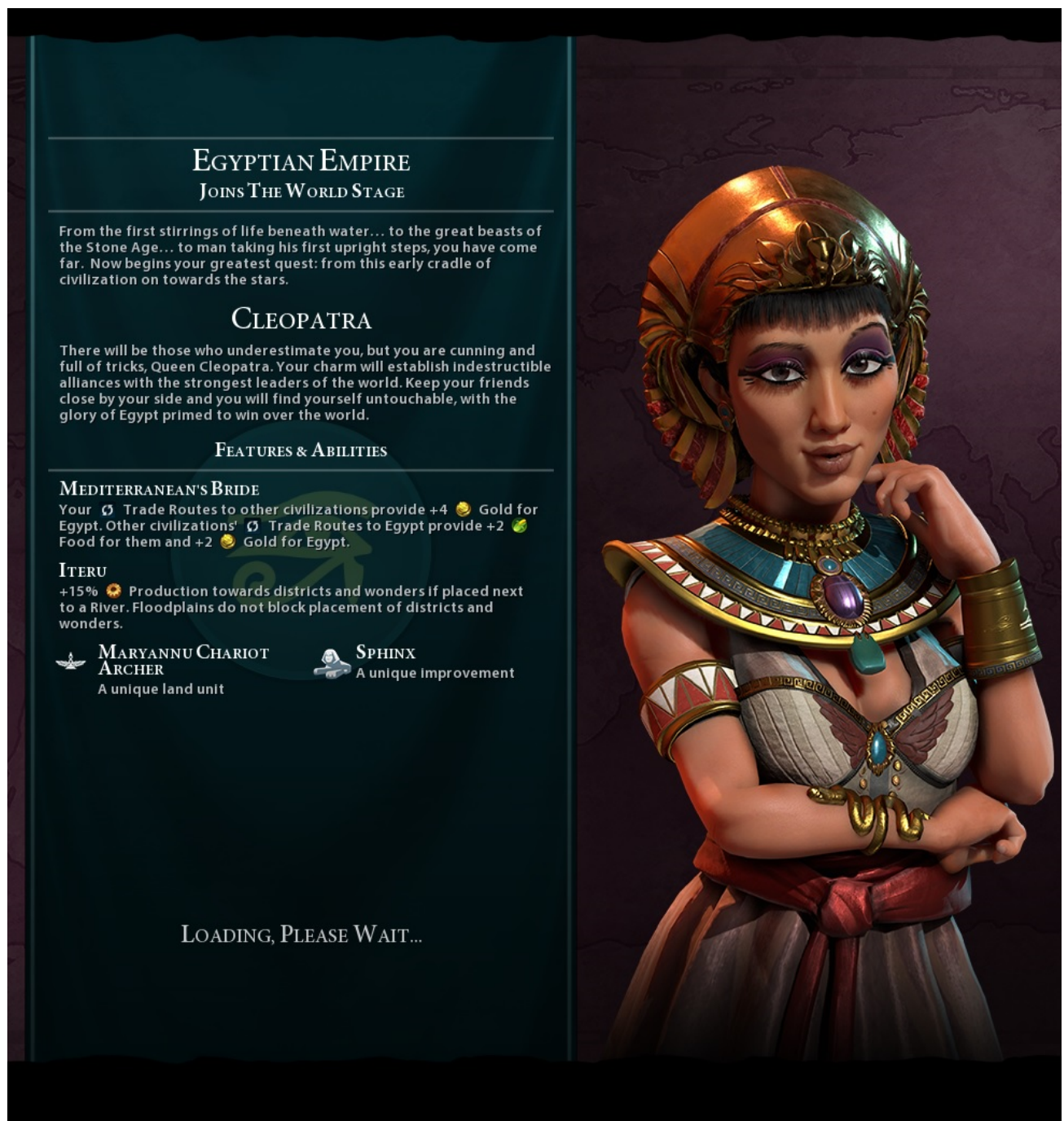
Western dominant ideology

Although the player is free to test history, many academics have critiqued *Civilization* games for providing a playing field and history which is characterized by western ideologies (Chapman, 2013; Uricchio, 2005; Voorhees, 2009). In order to win the game in its most efficient way it seems that becoming more like a western civilization seems to be the best strategy. "Civilization boils down to several ideologically positioned maxims such as the more efficient production, the more advanced the civilization; and the more democracy, the better" (Uricchio, 2005, p. 335). Even though the player has the freedom to choose any civilization utilizing very different specials skills and tactics, in the end, the ´best´ civilization that is most likely to win the game seems to be modelled after the American civilization. These tendencies are not only evident in the basic cause and effect logics of the playing field but also in the texture of surface details (p. 335). Video games like other texts are influenced in their representation by the ideological convictions of their authors. "In an era where issues of multiculturalism, gender, class, and generation emerged in the forefront of social policy and academic debate, it was but a small step to connect the dots between the partiality of representation and the issue of who was doing the representation" (p. 332). Chen warns us that most game studies focusing on the interactional component of games are prone to ignore the fact that video games are also cultural texts which are encoded with certain ideological positions (2013, p. 409). Although *Civilization* tries to portray a wide array of different cultures and create a playing field in which the player can choose what kind of history he wants to portray, it doesn't escape its western bias.

   In what manner does such a western bias influence the gamers process of identification with one of the represented cultures? Uricchio and Voorhees argue that event though civilization exhibits this western bias in its developmental model of history the game avoids making any explicit valuations of cultures or 'civilizations' (Uricchio, 2005; Voorhees, 2009). Every playable civilization needs to have an equal chance of winning the game. Therefore, although players might be motivated to model their civilization to western conventions, the western playable civilizations do not in any way trump non-western civilizations in the game. Therefore, the willingness of players to play with, and identify with, a non-western civilization doesn't seem to be affected by the western dominance of the media product. The problem is that the identified culture might not be a proper representation of the actual culture.

Most of the critics are based upon older versions of *Civilization*, *Civilization VI* might have been improved in this regard. Researching to a full extent to which degree *Civilization VI* still enforces a western bias lies beyond the scope of this research. Nevertheless, my own experience playing the game corresponds with the criticisms concerning the western ideology of *Civilization.* A good example might be the cultural victory. The player must attract the greatest amount of tourism amongst all civilizations in the game in order to achieve a cultural victory. The idea that a strong culture equals a strong tourism economy seems to be inspired by western societies. It is safe to say that *Civilization VI* is likely to exhibit similar western ideological tendencies as previous versions of the franchise game. Although this is very problematic for the usefulness of *Civilization VI* as a cultural vehicle, it does not directly influence the identification process of gamers. This research can provide a useful analysis of the identification process in games but in making any conclusions it must take into consideration that the identified culture might be a western biased representation of this culture.

3.3 Autoethnography results

I will first analyse my experience playing as Cleopatra and the Egyptian empire. I made no notes during this first game. Secondly, I will analyse my experience playing as Saladin and the Arabian empire. I did make notes during the second game. I will start presenting both campaign results with a short overview of my experience playing the game. Continuing, I will talk about my experience with the different elements of narrative and interactive identification.

EGYPTIAN EMPIRE
JOINS THE WORLD STAGE

From the first stirrings of life beneath water… to the great beasts of the Stone Age… to man taking his first upright steps, you have come far. Now begins your greatest quest: from this early cradle of civilization on towards the stars.

CLEOPATRA

There will be those who underestimate you, but you are cunning and full of tricks, Queen Cleopatra. Your charm will establish indestructible alliances with the strongest leaders of the world. Keep your friends close by your side and you will find yourself untouchable, with the glory of Egypt primed to win over the world.

FEATURES & ABILITIES

MEDITERRANEAN'S BRIDE
Your ⟳ Trade Routes to other civilizations provide +4 🟡 Gold for Egypt. Other civilizations' ⟳ Trade Routes to Egypt provide +2 🟢 Food for them and +2 🟡 Gold for Egypt.

ITERU
+15% ⚙ Production towards districts and wonders if placed next to a River. Floodplains do not block placement of districts and wonders.

MARYANNU CHARIOT ARCHER
A unique land unit

SPHINX
A unique improvement

LOADING, PLEASE WAIT…

Egypt & Cleopatra

The voice of Sean Bean tells me that I am queen Cleopatra and that I will make indestructible alliances. I look at my special abilities while I wait for the start button to appear. I chose to play as Egypt because I don't consider it to be my culture but a foreign culture and I intend to rely on their special trading abilities. I have previously played an older version of the game and I enjoyed being skilful at trade. After Sean Bean is finished with his narration the epical music becomes louder and

enthrals a feeling of impending adventure to me. I click the start button and I can settle my first city Râ-Kadet with access to some sugar and command my warriors to explore the surroundings.

I progress my empire a little by making a scout and discovering neighbouring China and some city-states. I decide to try and make an alliance with the city state of {insert name} because of their focus on wealth and trade, which is what I intend to focus upon myself. I quickly start researching pottery and irrigation which grands me access to the hanging gardens, the first wonder I construct. Continuing my focus on trade and wonder construction I progress my nation and build more additional cities. I advance my system of government to a merchant republic which allows me to exploit the Egyptian benefits of trade even further. All the great prophets have been collected before I get a chance to claim one leaving me without the chance of establishing my own religion. I had planned to establish a religion of my own making inspired by Egyptian mythology and feel quite frustrated that I wasn't able to make this happen. Although I am spending much time on the production of districts and wonders, the money income from my trade focus allows me to purchase buildings and units which keeps my cities essential needs progressing as well. Eventually, because of my world wonders, many sphinxes, archaeological and artistic treasures my civilization succeeds in attaining a cultural victory.

3.4 Narrative identification

Along the way, I have fought out wars with China and with America. Both wars were initiated by the opposing side. In the war with America I decide to push aggressively and managed to conquer two cities form America. Whilst playing and fighting these wars I often find that I am talking to myself. I am not, as far as I was aware, talking to myself out loud but in my head. I am also talking to the computer opponents in my head. I think phrases like "you should have never started a war with the Egyptian empire" when I conquer an opponent's major city. Or to myself I might say something like "The Americans are fools". If I think back at the time I was playing the game, it seems I construct a kind of narrative underlying the events depicted in the game. This narrative is partly formed by the actions of computer players and the depiction of their characters and partly by the way I responded to these actions and depictions and add meaning to them. Reflecting on my experience with games overall, I believe I often create grand narratives in my mind based on the events in games. I believe this shows that I am emotionally invested in the game and that I engage with my character role.

Empathy

Whilst playing I often feel emotionally triggered by the game. For example, successes make me feel happy and triumphant, whilst losing to a computer opponent makes me feel angry and vindictive. I

remember what a computer opponent might have done against me and try to 'make them pay' for their wrongdoings. Finally, the enthusiasm I feel whilst playing often makes me move my hands together, a movement which is often described by friends and family as a bit neurotic. I do this as if to release some tension or to celebrate something. This is an uncontrolled movement I only have at moments in which I feel happy. Therefore, I think my movements, the storyline I create in my head and the emotional triggers I felt show that I am emotionally involved in the game.

Understanding character

Because I played the game as Cleopatra and the Egyptian empire I was quite familiar with the nation and the character. I have read many stories, played a few games and watched some films about both Cleopatra and the Egyptian empire. Because I played through the entirety of the game I could use all the special abilities, units and buildings of Egypt, strengthening my understanding of the nation and the character. I based my decision partly on the Egyptian abilities and was very familiar with them and how to use them in the game.

Sharing character goals

I did feel like I shared the goals of my character, but maybe more the Egyptian nation than Cleopatra. As part of the special abilities of Egypt I wanted to focus on constructing many wonders, including the pyramids, and conduct a lot of trading. Thereby I shared the goals my character might have had. Furthermore, I feel like I also shared some goals with the Egyptian nation in emphasizing my uniqueness. Whilst playing I decide I want to build at least one sphinx in every city and some more additionally sphinxes next to world wonders because of the cultural bonuses these locations provide. The sphinx is the special building only available for the Egyptian nation. The reason I want to have at least one sphinx building in every city is that it gives my cities an Egyptian feel and for me personally it emphasizes the might of my Egyptian empire. Finally, I also relied heavily on the Maryann horse archer, Egypt's special unit, and attained many victories through the deployment of this unit. All these factors indicate the ways in which I shared the goals of my role-played character and nation. On the other hand, I do lose sight of my role as Cleopatra during the game. By the end of the game I think of myself more as the leader of the Egyptian nation than specifically Cleopatra.

Loss of self-awareness

Whilst playing I also often lost my self-awareness. I became engulfed in the narrative the game told and I fantasized. Furthermore, time passes much quicker and I forget all other matters that might have bothered me before. When I am playing a game, I am also unable to respond to conversations. I

give automated responses to phrases I don't hear. Finally, the actions I choose to undertake in *Civilization VI* do not reflect the way I would act in real life. These facts make me think that I lose my self-awareness whilst playing games and in specific *Civilization VI*. Besides me losing my self-awareness I also believe that I differentiated myself, or my nation, from the computer players through playing the game. I actively focused on emphasizing the special attributes of Egypt, I felt strong animosity towards the computer players and I tried to win from the computer players by playing better or differently from them.

3.5 Interactive identification

Player choices

Because I played the game all the way through to the end I could make use of all the game elements that allowed me to emulate the behaviour of the Egyptian empire and off Cleopatra. The reason I managed to become a global super power in the game was because of the special trade attributes I gained because of the special ability 'Mediterranean brides' belonging to Cleopatra. My decision to focus on trade routes and 'good' relationships with other players made me the richest player in the game, allowing me to buy many advantaged over the other players. I believe this focus emulates the way Cleopatra might have operated once upon a time. Furthermore, I made a special effort and managed to build the wonder the pyramids, emulating the historical behaviour of Egypt. Because the Egyptians build the pyramids they are considered to be first class wonder builders and because they owed much to their proximity to the Nile, the Egyptian empire gained the special ability 'Iteru' in the game which allows the Egyptian player to build world wonders and districts close to a river faster. I made use of the Iteru ability many times to build world wonders faster than my enemies and in effect, I won many of the wonder building races. These world wonders were the main reason I could achieve a cultural victory. By focusing on trade and building world wonders my game choices allowed me to emulate the historical behaviour of the Egyptian empire in the game. However, I did not manage to create a religion corresponding to the Egyptian nation which I had planned to do. Neither did I emulate Egyptian behaviour through the political system.

Appropriation of game mechanics

I found the appropriation of the game mechanics to be quite easy. I had played a previous version of the game and I am familiar with turn-based strategy games in general. Overall, I found the controls to be logical and I adapted to them rather quickly. I was unaware often of the actions I was performing with the mouse to make my units move. The game mechanics were intuitive up to a level where I did not need to think about them but instead could focus on tactical issues. I think this is also due to my

experience with games. The only control mechanic with which I experienced much trouble and frustration was the way in which the game switches between units. This caused me to often make mistakes and interrupted my game experience. Furthermore, the dense technical systems determining the effects of housing, food and certain special buildings was more difficult to understand. Eventually it took me several games of playing *Civilization VI* with different nations before I understood all the technical processes completely. But this understanding was not necessary to play the game nor to win, but it makes both easier. Finally, I did find the differentiation between nations through buildings and units to be a bit lacking. I would have liked more emphasis on different units and architecture to give a more authentic feel to the playable nations. The game does personalize the general units and buildings a bit for every nation, but these differences are almost only visible when the player zooms in. Zooming in however makes it difficult to oversee one's actions.

The ease with which I adapted to the gameplay of *Civilization VI* might also be because I consider myself to be the ideal audience for the game. I am not only very interested in strategic games but also in historic games. *Civilization VI* is a perfect combination of interests for me. I was therefore very eager to start playing the game and felt confident I would be able to master all its difficulties. After playing, I would consider myself a capable player of *Civilization VI*; although, to play *Civilization VI* on a more competitive level online I would still need a few more hours of practice.
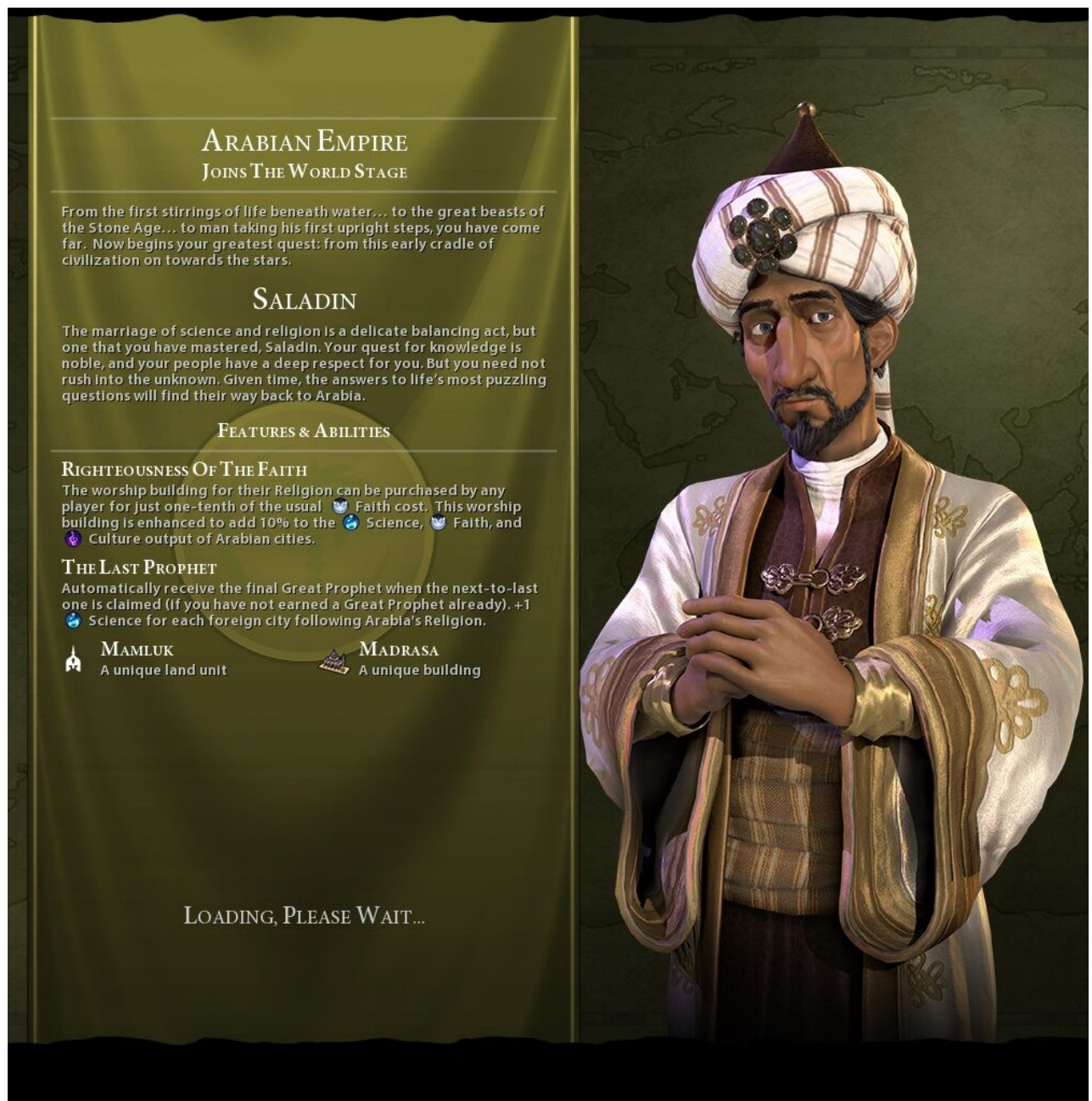
Arabia & Saladin

While I played as Saladin I made notes to track the playing process. However, I found it very difficult to stop playing at intervals to make notes. I was often so invested in the game that I did not stop to think about making notes when something noteworthy happened. When I did think about making notes I often found myself wondering what was important to write down. Nevertheless, I continued playing and finished the game.

As I begin the game I am transported by the music of *Civilization VI* and the voice of Sean Bean yet again when I prepare myself for playing the game as Saladin of Arabia. I am told that I have mastered the difficult task of balancing science and religion. I read the special abilities of the Arabian nation and Saladin and decide I will try and make use of the religious and in effect scientific advantages of my role-played character and nation. I begin the game by settling my first city of Cairo. Cairo give me access to the luxury resources incense and jade, giving me a head start in amenities. Cairo is also close to a mountain range, which provides me with suitable locations for religious and science districts. I decide I want to make use of the special last prophet ability and start first with the production of a campus. I progress gradually and build an additional city. I have attained some money and decide I want to use it for a settler to create another city. The settler however is captured by barbarians. A long crusade trying to recover the settler ends in failure. Another settler is taken by an enemy player when Japan declares war on me. I find myself quite frustrated and angry about the beginning of the game. Begrudgingly I must prepare for a war with Japan. Thanks to several smart tactical movements I manage to overcome the big invading force Japan had sent to my second city. Now that I have defeated the Japanese army I decide to push back. I conquer both Japans capital and its second biggest city. After these conquests, Japan and I decide to make peace with another. Although I had a bit of a rough start, the taking of two more additional cities gives me a leading position in the game.

By now I have made use of my special prophet ability and found the Islamic religion. Because I waited until the last prophet would be granted to me through my special ability, I find myself in the last position in the religious race. I must spend a lot of money to keep up with the computer players on the religious front. I continue advancing both my religion and my scientific process. The special Madrassa buildings I can construct in my campuses help me in progressing at a higher pace. Eventually I must fight four more wars with America, Egypt, Scythia and India. The first two wars were engaged by my enemies and force me to focus on military production. I am so caught up in these struggles that I almost allow the Arabian religion to be completely taken over by other religions. I manage to win the wars and to push back on the religious front and convert several enemy and friendly cities to the Islamic religion. By now, I am in the lead and doing well on all fronts. I decide to expand my religious capabilities through constructing special wonders and focusing on creating artefacts. Eventually I manage to destroy all other religions accept for Brazil's Catholicism. Most the world is now Islamic, which is granting me a considerable science boost. I decide to start building a spaceport and hoped to win the game through science.

3.6 Narrative identification

Empathy

Like during the game I played as Egypt I find myself emotionally involved in the game. I find the change in my state of mind which occurs in the beginning of the game especially noteworthy. After losing to of my very important settler units I am very disappointed and angry, practically ready to quit the game. After a while though I recover and eventually take the lead after conquering two important Japanese cities. This lightens my mood greatly and I suddenly find it extremely hard to stop the game again. The triumph I feel coming from the underdog position ending up on top is quite thrilling.

Understanding character

My role-played character Saladin and the Arabian nation are quite familiar to me. I have read several books on the crusades in which Saladin features. I have also played other video games situated in the Arabian empire and seen movies about it. I have chosen to play as Saladin and the Arabian empire because I wanted to achieve a scientific victory this time. I wanted to play a different game than the one in which I focused on trade and money. The combination of a religious and scientific focus appeals to me as well.

Sharing character goals

Because of my strong focus on religion and science I believe I have shared Saladin's goals quite well during my time playing the game. I have also relied heavily upon the Madrassa building in the scientific district. By making use of the Mamluk unit I can beat back the invading army of the American nation. I also believe that my strong religious conquest can be seen as a goal that I shared with the Arabian nation. Besides the fact that making use of the special abilities helps me to win the game more easily, as I did in both the Arabian as the Egyptian game, I also find focusing on the abilities and unique elements pleasing because of the way the cultural uniqueness of my empire. Building a Sphinx and a Medrassa in every city in the game is strategically not the smartest move but I still desired to do so. That being said, it remains difficult to pinpoint exactly the reasons I felt for every action. Playing as Saladin I again lost sight of my role. I think that part of the reason the character roles vague over time is because they are not portrayed while playing the game. In the beginning, I tried to emulate Saladin's tranquil nature by not engaging in too many wars, but the game forced me in a different direction. Later on, I am the one who starts wars from a position of power and I am no longer occupied with the image of Saladin in my head.

Loss of self-awareness

In terms of my loss of self-awareness and differentiation with enemy players I find myself in the same state as during my game played as Cleopatra. Whilst playing I am completely absorbed in the act. Furthermore, I try to emphasize the uniqueness of my culture and outsmart the computer players with different tactics. I consider them to be my enemies and desire to differentiate from them, to be better than them.

3.7 Interactive identification

Player choices

Looking back, I believe that the choices that I made whilst playing as the Arabian empire emulated the behaviour of the empire. I actively spread the Islamic religion around the world and tried to attain a scientific victory making use of Arabia's special building and ability. However, now that I played the game more thoughtfully a second time I did feel like the elements through which I was able to emphasize and emulate Arabia's uniqueness were quite few. The first time I played the game was rather new to me, now I had more time to think about these elements. I had also conducted two of the interviews by the time I played my second game and these interviews made me look differently at the game as well. The game encompasses a lot of elements connected to cultural aspects such as the ideology system, the science system, the world wonders, the special abilities and the unique units and buildings. But these elements are only few in the grandeur of the game. Every nation, for the greater part, has the same units and buildings. These are personalized a bit to reflect the culture of the nation, but this is a background issue. I would have found it more interesting if every nation would have a completely different playstyle and look. This is already in effect because of the special abilities, but I would have liked it to be much more than only a tactical advantage. Nevertheless, I did grasp every possibility to emphasize my uniqueness as the Arabian empire. When an enemy player managed to complete the Hagia Sophia world wonder, a wonder which I considered to belong to my empire, I felt very upset. This was not because I wished to make use of the special advantage the Hagia Sophia provides, but because of its cultural connotations. Therefore, I did feel like my player choices emulated the Arabian empire, but I would have liked to be able to emphasize cultural differences even more.

Appropriation of game mechanics

My appropriation of the game mechanics was practically completed after the first time playing as the Egyptian empire. Still, I learned some new mechanics in this game with which I was still unfamiliar like the necessary conditions for a natural park. This shows that *Civilization VI* is a game with a very

extended tactically dense game which merits more than one visit. The way I approached the game in terms of the affordances the game requested of me and the effectivities I felt I needed to bring to bear, were the same as with my first game. I felt I was a target audience of the game and it appealed to me as a strategic and historic game. Furthermore, I felt that I was a capable player of the game.

4. Ethnography

In this chapter I will present the results of the ethnographic research. The results will be given following the structure of the theoretical framework, beginning with the components of narrative identity and followed by the components of interactive identity. The results will also be represented in a narrating method to stay close to the autoethnography methodology. Finally, unexpected results will be presented.

4.1 Narrative identification

During the observations and interviews I noticed that all participants experienced some degree of identification with the narrative of the game story whilst playing. These results will be presented by following the five dimensions of narrative identity highlighted in the theoretical framework. Throughout this chapter I will refer to the participants by pseudonyms: Capheus, Kala, Lito, Nomi and Riley. Furthermore, every time I quote participants these quotes will be translated by the author.

Empathy

Empathy in the context of narrative identification is concerned with the level of empathic investment the reader has with a character in the narrative. For games this can be translated into the emotional investment players have towards their role-played character and nation. Whilst observing the participants playing I noted some degree of emotional responses on events occurring in the game.

Many players reacted verbally to the events depicted in the game. Sometimes calling computer players names, sometimes cursing. Kala for example, often referred to the computer players as "Bitch", especially when the computer players commented on her actions. She also said: "You are a shrew, I am going to get you". Lito uttered "Booya" when he successfully defeated military targets of an enemy players, evidencing that he was feeling happy in correspondence to the success of his character and nation. Nomi seemed less emotionally involved but also made remarks such as "what is her problem?". This shows that she at least feels personally confronted by the other civilizations in the game. Riley made the most remarks of all the players, saying for example "I hate barbarians", referring to the barbarians in the game that work against any player. This evidently shows that she feels some anger towards the barbarians. Furthermore, Riley ridiculed a different civilization with a silly voice, suggesting that she feels anger or irritation towards this other civilization. She also said "beautiful" when observing her own buildings, suggesting that she feels

pride and happiness about her own achievements. Finally, she uttered "c'mon you men" when she initiated a military battle with her soldiers, suggesting that she was emotionally involved with them. Remarks such as the above suggest that the players have an emotional investment in the game, the remarks reflect feelings of happiness, anger and frustration concerning the player's standing in the game.

Participants also showed some emotional involvement through their movements. Many players showed feelings of tension and excitement through small energetic movements. Riley for example began rocking back and forth on her chair as she became more involved in the game. Capheus made punching motions towards the screen portraying at that moment the image of an enemy computer player, just after declaring war to this enemy player. This suggests that the act of declaring war holds some emotional significance for the player and that it is not merely regarded as another mouse click.

Surprisingly, not many players acknowledged an emotional investment in the game in the interviews. For example, Kala stated that she was not emotionally involved in the game, whilst my observations made me think she might have been the player that was the most emotionally involved. Later in the interview Kala does state that she felt happiness and sadness corresponding to in game victories or losses. Capheus does state in his interview that he feels he is emotionally invested in the game, but only with some distance. When asked about declaring war to England, the moment Capheus made boxing motions towards the screen, he states that he did feel tension in this moment. As stated above, Nomi seemed the least emotionally involved in the game. Correspondingly she stated that there is a tactical desire that makes one care for produced units, but there might not be an emotional attachment behind this 'caring'.

Lito and Kala also stated they felt emotionally invested in the game, but they seemed to be a bit reluctant about it. Lito states that he thinks he was emotionally involved in his character and role. But he makes a distinction between actually caring for one's soldiers and caring about what happens to the soldiers. By this he means that he did care what happened with his soldiers in terms of game strategy, but that he did not care for his soldiers as persons or emotional involvement. He feels happy or said corresponding to game events such as success or loss, but does not believe he has an emotional connection. In the interview Riley also acknowledged that she was emotionally involved. She stated for example: "when I build [ ] builders instead of warriors it truly felt the same as when I accidently lose money or accidently buying the wrong thing in a shop…". This is evidence of the fact that riley 's emotions corresponded to game events in a like manner as real-life events trigger emotional reactions. It is interesting to note that afterwards, she was surprised when confronted

with her utterances and seemed unaware of the depth of her involvement in the game, to some degree perhaps even ashamed of her involvement in the game.

Understanding character

The understanding of the role-played characters and nations differed highly amongst the participants. Some participants based their character choice upon elements they recognised where others choose to go for something completely unknown. These differences in character choice directly reflected the players difference in knowing the characters. Furthermore, the level of dependence on the special abilities, created by the game designers to reflect an aspect of the role-played character, also varied heavily amongst players. This variation reflects a variation in how well players understood their role-played characters and their historical significance.

For example, Capheus played as the kingdom of Kongo and Mvemba a Nzinga and was the only participant that choose a nation because of his own unfamiliarity with it. He stated in the interview that he was unfamiliar with the Kongolese king. In similar computer games Capheus often prefers to play as Roman or Greek nations. Because I asked the participant to choose a culture he considered to be foreign and because he had never played as an African nation in a strategy game before, he decided to play as kongo. Lito also chose to play as a fairly unfamiliar nation and was the only one who disliked his role-played character. He played as Gilgamesh and the Sumerian empire. He chose to play as the Sumerian empire because he knew it was one of the oldest empires in history and he found this aspect to be appealing. Furthermore, the participant found Gilgamesh to be very unattractive because he had read in the character description of Gilgamesh that it was unsure whether Gilgamesh had actually existed.

Participants Kala, Nomi and Riley based their decisions upon the appeal of their nations of choice. Kala played as India and Muhammar Gandhi. Her choice was motivated by the fact that she considered India to be a foreign country and that she found India intriguing for being a large country. Similarly, Nomi, who played as Tsar Peter and Russia, stated that she chose to play as Russia because she liked the description of Russia which the game provided. Riley played as Qin Shi Huang and the Chinese empire. She was motivated to play as China because of a book she was reading which was centred on Chinese main characters and depicted several time periods in China.

All players, except for Kala, did not know their role-played characters. For Capheus and Lito the characters remained unknown even after playing the game. Capheus states that he did not feel like he had become more acquainted with the king or the nation after playing the game. He had forgotten the unique abilities of his nation and character and had not been able to construct his

special units or buildings, which are the few elements of the game through which a player can gain some cultural awareness. Similarly, Lito stated that he did not know Gilgamesh nor that the game succeeded in improving his knowledge of the role-played character. The participant was a bit familiar with the Sumerian empire but states that he lost track of the fact that he was playing as the Sumerian empire gradually. Towards the end he no longer felt as if he was leading the Sumerian empire but rather leading an empire of his own making.

Participants Nomi and Riley did feel like they became a bit more acquainted with their role-played character after playing the game. In the beginning Nomi was unfamiliar with the Tsar and did not know how he would act in the game. Later in the interview she stated that she tried to play as a Russian leader and might have played as Tsar Peter would have preferred. This suggests that the game has given her some impression on the character of Tsar Peter. In a likewise manner Riley was unfamiliar with emperor Qin Shi Huang at the start of the game. Only by playing the game did she become a little more acquainted with the emperor and the Chinese nation, mainly through some of the special abilities she utilized and recalled in the interview. Apart from the familiarization with emperor Qin Shi Huang, it seemed as if Riley was not concerned with emperor Qin Shi Huang as much as she was concerned with the Chinese nation.

Kala was the only one who was familiar with her role-played character from the start of the game. She stated in the interview that, in most cases, she had an idea of how her character, Gandhi, would act. Gandhi is off course a more widely known figure than, for example, Mvemba a Nzinga. Accordingly, she seemed to play from a basic understanding of Gandhi and India. In the interviews, she also repeatedly gave the impression of knowing how Gandhi would play. Furthermore, she was also aware of the special abilities of India and Gandhi and stated that she tried to focus on these abilities.

Sharing character goals

The sharing of character goals seems to be connected to the understanding of character by the fact that there is also a big difference amongst the participants in the depth in which they shared the goals of their role-played character. Some participants knew their characters better and tried to emulate behaviour which the represented historical figure's might have shown. Other participants tried to build on the unique abilities of their characters, for some these abilities were not yet relevant because they didn't progress far enough in the game (some were late-game abilities). Since players also role-play a nation, I also looked at the way in which they shared the goals of their role-played nation. The role-played nations themselves have a unique unit, building and ability. Many players did

make use of these nation characteristics. The unique abilities of these nations and leaders can be seen to represent the goals these nations have had in historic perspective. Focusing on enacting these unique abilities of the nations therefore corresponds with sharing the goals of the nations.

Only Kala was very clear on who her role-played character was, tried to emulate her characters behaviour extensively and progressed far enough in the game to make use of her nation's and character's special abilities. She states that she accepted her role as the leader of the Indian nation and tried to act accordingly. She actively tried to play as Gandhi might have played, her choices were inspired by her Gandhi role. Kala thought she had quite a clear image of the play style that lies close to the historical character of Gandhi. She states, "I also did things because I thought that that would fit with him", him being Gandhi. In accordance, she made extensive use of the unique unit and abilities of the Indian nation and Gandhi. Like Kala, Nomi also tried to play according to her leader role, although her role-played character was not very clear to her. She found help in defining this role in the unique abilities of Russian and Tsar Peter. She focussed especially on exploiting the unique abilities and special buildings of Russia during the game. In doing so, she shared the goals of Tsar Peter as presented by the game. Nomi states that she believed she was sharing the goals of Tsar Peter also because she was trying to build a strong and big Russia.

In contrast, Capheus did not know his role-played character nor tried to play as the leader of Kongo nor progressed far enough in the game to make use of Kongo's special abilities, units and buildings. However, he did feel like he was adopting the goals of a character, showing that Capheus had mixed feelings about his role. He stated that the character he shared goals with was not the role-played leader of Kongo but a more general "leader of a people". The special abilities of Kongo and its leader are more relevant later in the game and in effect Capheus did not progress far enough to utilize them. He does state that if he would have played the game longer that he would have like to focus more on the unique abilities of his nation. He states that he "normally", when playing similar games, likes to take more time, read more of the backstory and use more of the special abilities. He further states that because of the time limit, which was explained to the participants before playing, he played more "superficially". Riley also seemed to feel mixed about her role and the way in which she shared goals with her role-played character. On the one hand, she stated that she made choices based on what she thought was "fun" and that she did not feel like the leader of the Chinese nation. On the other hand, she states that she did feel responsible for het nation, that she wanted to be loved by her subjects, that she tried to enact the role of a good nation leader and that she did try to build on the special abilities of the Chinese nation. Furthermore, she also states that she would not

act in real life like she did in the game. It seems that Riley was sharing the goals of a nation leader but perhaps not the specific leader Qin Shi Huang.

Lito seems to have been the participant that shared the goals of his character the least. Although he utilized the special ability of the Sumerian empire and was able to build its special unit and building, he did not feel like he shared goals with the Sumerian empire. Lito says he played in a style true to his own person. If he had found himself in a similar situation, as presented in the game, in real life he would have acted in the same way. Therefore, he might have played according to his own goals. Nevertheless, it seemed as if Lito based his strategy on the aspects that make the Sumerian empire strong and unique. It might be that he felt as if he played only according to his own choice and intelligence, whilst at the same time his choices and strategy were highly influenced by the special abilities of the Sumerian empire. It seems the Sumerian empire was not quite unique enough to also transfer the cultural connotation that accompanies the game strategy to Lito.

Loss of self-awareness

Interestingly all players, up to some degree, experienced a loss of self-awareness. The game gave the players a feeling of being in control of the action. As the players play a central role in influencing the events that take place, the players seem to become absorbed into the game. Capheus states that he felt as if he was "pulled into the game" and that he himself was a part of the action. Riley also states that she lost track of time, a feeling most participants shared. Furthermore, players often made comments in themselves or towards the screen, as if talking to a real person. Nomi for example often reacted verbally to game characters that made certain statements, this suggests that the player is immersed in the situation and feels addressed by the game. Riley also remarked that she thought she was very stimulus sensitive whilst playing the game which also made her feel submerged in the game. Finally, Riley also stated that she found it quiet confronting when I presented her with some of her own actions and remarks she made whilst playing the game. She had forgotten about them and they changed her opinions on what it felt like playing the game. This example shows that the player was submerged to a degree that she was unaware in some part of her own actions. Perhaps Riley's focus on the game made her less aware of the actions she performed in real life.

Furthermore, the players also seemed to lose a part of their own identity. Almost all players, excluding Nomi, seemed to take on a different role. The players based their choices upon their image of what a good nation leader would do, or even a specific leader of a specific nation, not upon what they would do in a similar situation. Thereby, the players seemed to change their identity a bit to fit to their roll, losing a bit of self-awareness. Capheus stated for example "yes, if I would be a world

leader in reality than I would not act like this", referring to his play style. Kala and Riley even seemed to identify with their role so much that they wished to protect their fictive subjects or to be loved by their fictive subjects. On the other hand, they have also stated that they acted more closely to their own nature than that of their role. Nevertheless, they also both stated that they tried to behave as a world leader. Furthermore, Riley also states that she would never lie like she did whilst playing the game. It seems that their role's might be a mixture between their understanding of the role-played character and their own identities. Especially considering that Kala and Riley seemed the most absorbed in the game from all the participants. Kala makes a very clarifying remark stating:

> "Yes, that is a super difficult question because you act from your own way of thinking ... but you also are [someone else], yes ... I think it is also just double again."

She seems to think that whilst playing the game she played a role based on her role-played character and herself, because of the inevitability that she herself had to think about the actions she was going to perform. The only participant who unequivocally stated that he played as himself was Lito. Lito did lose his self-awareness in the sense that he was absorbed into the game, but he did not feel like he filled a different role whilst playing the game. It seems this might be strongly related to the fact that the player disliked the character Gilgamesh and lost sight of his role as the leader of the Sumerian empire.

Differentiation with others

It is interesting that all players also positioned themselves firmly against the computer players in the game. Not only did most players utter verbal remarks against enemy computer players portrayed in the cut scenes in the game, some even made physical assertive movements against the computer screen portraying the enemy computer players. There seemed to be an emotional involvement in the way players reacted upon computer players. Even the peace-loving players, Kala, Nomi and Riley, had a strong dislike for their computer opponents. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Nomi managed to stay out of any war conflict whilst playing the game, she was the only player who managed this feat. It seems the portrayal of enemy computer players is a strong driver behind the dislike the players felt for the computer players.

Although there seems to have been a lot of enmity amongst the players against the computer players, they did not seem to put special effort into differentiating themselves with the computer players. Capheus, Kala and Nomi for example state that they did not consciously try to play the game in a different way than the computer player did. However, they did think of themselves as

different from the computer player, not only in appearance but in play style as well. Remarkably Lito stated that he did try to play the game differently than his computer opponent whilst he did not see the computer player as fundamentally different from himself. He thought the cultures in the game were quite alike because the detail of the game was quite thin. It seems that the desire to differentiate with the computer player came from the idea that the computer player was not as smart a player as Lito himself was. He states that he did not think the computer player was as smart as a human and gave an example in which the computer player 'should have known better'. Perhaps the player's differentiation with the computer player lies more in the enmity and the desire of winning the game than in cultural differences. The cultural differences seem to function more as tools for achieving this goal. Nevertheless, I observed players having a distinct greater dislike for certain computer players and nations than for others. This dislike seemed to be based upon the behaviour of the opponent, suggesting that at least personality was a factor in the opposition between players. Kala, who played as the Indian empire, had a specifically troubling relationship with the English empire, whether this is a coincidence or a historically and culturally motivated differentiation is difficult to say. But she clearly stated that she felt enmity towards England and that she considered her nation and herself to be very different from the English computer player. Suggesting that at least some cultural aspects might weigh in.

4.2 Interactive identification

I will discuss the results of the interactive identification with the game in the same style as the results of the narrative identification were given, following the different elements of interactive identification. In order to understand whether players experienced identification through their interaction with the game I researched whether player's choices corresponded with the game and their role, indicating they identified with their role. I also looked at the way in which players appropriated the game mechanics which facilitate the interaction with the game. Finally, I also looked at the affordances the game demands and the effectivities the player needs to supply. The affordance and effectivities will clarify how motivated or willing players are to interact with the game and thereby identify with the game (Yates & Littleton, 1999).

Player choices

In part I have already discussed the way in which player choices emulate the behaviour of historical characters above in the section of narrative identification. The element of sharing goals with the role-played character has a lot of overlap with the element of emulating play from everyday life through logical player choices. Both look at the way in which players choose to play in accordance to their

role as world leader and are constrained by the player's historical knowledge of this role. However, interactive identification through player choices is concerned with playful elements and therefore I will detail in which way players did or did not use playful elements in their interaction with the game to emulate the kind of play you would expect from their character. I will focus on the play elements the game offers to emulate the play of real life and the way in which players interacted with these elements.

One of the playful elements of identification with a nation in the game *Civilization VI* is the founding of a religion. Most players did not come far enough in the game to found their own religion. Capheus for example firmly states that, if he would have been England and he would have progressed far enough to establish a religion, he would have founded Protestantism. He also did not progress far enough to build a world wonder nor to build a world wonder related to his own civilization. But if he would have been able to build world wonders corresponding to his nation he stated that he would have had a motivation to do so. Capheus was also not able to build his nations special units or buildings because they become available later in the game. This is a severe limitation for the ability to identify with your own nation. Although this limitation on interactive identification is mainly due to the constraints of this research, it is also a limitation of the game. The uniqueness of every nation is often not viable for the whole duration of a game, especially the unique units of a nation are of a very temporary nature because technological progress makes them obsolete swiftly.

One of the players that did get to found a religion was Kala, she founded Taoism whilst playing as India. Nomi also founded a religion, namely Catholicism whilst being Russia. Respectively, Buddhism or Hinduism would have been the logical historical religion choices for India and eastern orthodoxy is the historical religion of Russia. It seems both players made a different choice because they have special personal relations with other religions, those they eventually chose. Nomi herself was raised catholic. Kala thought that Taoism would fit better with a peaceful attitude, associating it with the Ying and Yang balance. This suggest that, at least for these two players, the choice of religion was not necessarily a way to identify with the played nation but more a way of integrating the nation with their own believes. Another element of playful interactive identification was the building of wonders. All players agreed that if they would have been able to build the wonders corresponding to their nations they would have made special effort to do so. Riley even stated that she was not sad that someone else build Stonehenge, which meant that she could not build that wonder anymore. She was glad because Stonehenge would not have fitted within her Chinese nation, in her opinion. Noteworthy is that not a single player actually progressed far enough in the

game to actually test these claims. Some players managed to start and finish wonders but not those that belonged to their own nation.

Next there are also the afore mentioned unique abilities of every nation and their unique units and buildings which a player can use to emulate the play inspired by history. Most players made use of these special abilities provided by the game, often because they thought that these choices corresponded with what a good nation leader or their character would do. Capheus however felt that he could not effectively use the unique abilities of his nation in order to emulate the play expected of his nation and his character because of a lack in game understanding. He did not focus much on the unique abilities of Kongo because he had forgotten what they were and because he was trying to find out what the best way was to play the game. With a game such as *Civilization VI* in which the intended mode of play is to start many new games playing different nations, which is quite strategically challenging with and very dense in its consequential game dynamics, it might be necessary to play the game several times before a player can effectively make use of a nations specific abilities. In my own experience playing the game I found that after I played several games I became more selective about which nations I wanted to play and the unique abilities I wished to use. After getting familiar with the game I became much more efficient in using a nations unique abilities, buildings and units to their full extent. Using the unique abilities of a nation is therefore closely linked to understanding and progressing in the game, especially considering that some unique abilities are also more worthwhile in the late game. Participants Nomi and Riley also did not get to use the special units of their respective nations. Kala who did get to use her special units and did get to build her specific buildings felt very happy using and building them. She especially loved her Indian elephant unit. For her, these elements seemed to contribute to her strong identification with the Indian nation. On the other hand, Lito was also able to build the special unit and the special building but did not seem to identify heavily with his nation. He was also disappointed by the level of differentiation in detail, it might be that he did not find the 'war cart', the special unit of the Sumerian empire, to be unique enough. It might be that he required a greater amount and more detailed elements of play in order to identify satisfactorily with this nation.

Furthermore, Capheus also stated that he thinks the level of differentiation between nations in the unit and building detail is very low and that this works against the identification with your own playable nation. Lito mentioned a similar feeling of disconnection with his own nation due to the low level of differentiation in building and unit detail between civilizations. There is a slight differentiation between buildings and units of different cultures but in order to appreciate these differences the player has to zoom in. Zooming in does not happen often because it does not provide

the gamer with a helpful overview of the game. Furthermore, Capheus and Lito stated that they found the fact that the game is not geographically correct disruptive for their identification with their respective nations. It seems the game might not present sufficient elements of play that emphasize the uniqueness of every nation to satisfy every kind of player.

Finally, *Civilization VI* also uses a political system in which the player can decide what kinds of ideologies to follow. Mainly in the late game these choices become more significant. During my observations and in the interviews, I did not find that any of the players used the political or technological system to emphasize the uniqueness of their nations.

Appropriation of game mechanics

In order to measure the level of appropriation of the game mechanics the participants experienced whilst playing the game I will look at their understanding of the controls, whether the controls feel logical and intuitive and whether the player lost awareness of playing.

All players experienced a learning curve whilst playing the game. The players required much explanation beginning their game since the game is rather complicated. I was afraid that the difficult interlinked systems like trading, diplomacy, technology, ideology and the city dynamics would prove to be a turnoff for unfamiliar or inexperienced players. The exact opposite proved to be the case. After an hour of playing most players were capable enough to make their own decisions without need for extra explanations and seemed to find pleasure in researching the game mechanics. Capheus even stated that he found that learning the controls was quite easy, he only needed a half an hour to play around with the controls. However, he also stated that he would have liked to restart the game now that he had acquired a better understanding of the game mechanics. In a subsequent game the participants would have been able to make their nation choices with a better understanding of what the unique abilities and buildings actually meant in playing the game. This would have made it significantly easier to formulate a game strategy for example. This being said, all players stated in the interview that they thought of themselves as capable *Civilization VI* players. It seems the amount of playtime was enough to give players the feeling they were competent in playing the game. Becoming a better gamer always involves returning to the game several times.

Most players seemed to find the controls of the game to be rather logical and intuitive. The controls corresponded with their way of interacting with computers. Capheus did find that he needed to change his way of playing a bit because the controls a bit different from another game he had been playing, *Total War*. Most players did not experience this problem however and found the

controls logical and easy to understand. That being said, there was one piece of game mechanic that caused all participants quite a bit of irritation and mishaps. The game has an automatic system of switching between units after they have been given a command every round. Participants needed to familiarize themselves with this mechanic which did not seem logical to them and which they often forgot to account for. The result was that many players accidently moved the wrong units to the wrong place. This meant for some players that they had to wait a turn or two longer before their units reached their destination, for some this meant that their whole plan failed because of a critical misstep. Lito stated that he almost felt ready to quit the game when this happened to him. All participants experienced problems with this mechanic and found that it interrupted their flow of play. The brake in game play and the irritation which this piece of mechanic often caused pulled the participants out of the game and back into reality. Furthermore, Kala also experienced some disruption in her interaction with the game because the English language use in the game which she was not always able to follow. Lito also found the tactics behind which building to build difficult to grasp and often resorted to the recommended options, provided by the game. Sometimes the long-term strategy remained difficult to grasp. Apart from these smaller issues, the game mechanics overall appealed to the participants and felt logical.

Whilst playing most participants became unaware of the actions they needed to perform in order to move their units around and to build their civilization. Instead of being aware that they were moving their mouse around and clicking most participants felt like they were simply moving their units and building their buildings. This suggests that the game mechanics were logical enough to absorb the player into the game, the gamer does not need to spend time to contemplate his interaction with the technological devices. Their interaction with the computer became an automated process. Nomi and Riley have also stated that they lost track of time during the game and that it felt as if the four hours of playing were over in no time. Losing awareness of your interaction with a device like this stimulates the interaction with the game content and facilitates player identification with the game.

Affordances & effectivities

The affordances of a game are partially determined by the way it is marketed to its audience, this lies beyond the scope of this research however. What I could investigate in this research is whether the game appealed to the players, how willing they are to play the game and whether they felt capable of playing the game. This will clarify whether or not players felt reluctant to interact with the game, which affects their willingness to engage with characters and to identify with them.

Interestingly participants Kala and Riley were dreading the prospect of playing a videogame for four hours, but both agreed after playing that the game was much more appealing than they had thought at first. For them, the idea of playing a videogame seemed unappealing at first, but they reconsidered after playing their first game. After playing all the participants found the game appealing in some manner, even though some participants would have preferred more differentiating detail between playable nations. There was a discordance between participants about the appeal of the playable characters and nations. Capheus did not find any nation or character particularly interesting but found the fact that there is a multitude to choose from pleasing. Kala on the other hand liked the different playable nations very much and had a difficult time choosing which one to play. Lito thought the characters were portrayed a little to "kiddie" for his liking and for this reason did not find the characters very appealing. He did find the playable nations appealing. Riley only disliked the American nation because of the current president of the United States, Donald Trump. It is interesting that all players seemed to like the overall gameplay of the game and the content such as the music used and the interface, but when it comes to the playable nations and characters personal preferences seem to enter the mix.

Capheus was very willing to play the game considering that it is exactly the kind of game he likes to play. He believes that a precondition for the appeal of the game is that a player must have some interest in history. Kala, Nomi and Riley thought the game would be very complicated but found the game much more accessible than they initially thought. Lito on the other hand believed that he was able to play the game well because of his previous game experiences. In the end though every participant seemed to willingly interact with the game and enjoy the game, suggesting that there are many misconceptions about playing the game. These misconceptions might decrease the willingness of players to start playing the game or to identify with game characters. In this case I asked the participants to play the game and therefore they seem to have overcome their misconceptions.

All players thought that they were capable players of *Civilization VI* after playing the game. There was some differentiation between players about the quality of their interaction with the game. But all players stated that they felt they were able to play the game effectively. Only Kala thought she might have some difficulty playing the game again because of the English language in the game. I also asked the participants whether they thought they belonged to the target audience of *Civilization VI*. All participants thought that they belonged to a group of intended players for *Civilization VI*. This shows that all players did not consider the game to be beyond or below them.

4.3 Unexpected results

During my field work I found a few results that did not directly correspond with the theoretical and methodological set up of the research. These unexpected results can be summarized in the feeling of trying on a different role. In the theoretical framework, the assumption was made that the interactional component of games would entail that the player involves the self somehow in the identification process. I hypothesized that identification in games would involve some form of discussion between the self and the identified character. However, I did not foresee that the self would be included up to the extent that players felt as if they were combining themselves with their role-played character roles. Participants often referred to situations and feelings in which they felt as if they were mixing their own identity with the identity of their role-played character. I have called this element the self in other shoes. Many players seemed to experience that whilst they were playing they thought of themselves as being the leader of a nation, not themselves. But at the same time their own personalities were influencing their decisions and thoughts. All participants referred to their respective nations as their own nations. Riley for example stated that she was the leader of her own nation, not the Chinese nation, although it was clearly influenced by Chinese culture which she also tried to enforce. She said:

> "I did not feel that much in the game that I also took on a different identity, it was just [name participant, Riley] and I played it as the leader of a nation."

It seems like she felt as if she was trying on a different role in a hypothetical scenario. At the same time Riley recognized that she would not act in the same way in real life as she did while playing the game. It is a kind of simulation in which a player can try on a new role for themselves. Most other participants exhibited similar feelings. For example, the reasons for Kala and Nomi to choose for an unconventional religion for their nation seemed to be personal. At the same time, both these participants were trying to be effective world leaders and tried to emulate the behaviour of a world leader and their role-played character. It seems the role the player takes on is a mixture between the personality of the player and the personality of the role-played character. Especially Kala tried to act in accordance to the expected actions of Gandhi, whilst at the same time she stated that many of her decisions were also based upon her own feelings and thoughts. This feeling of mixing one's personal character with the role-played character seems to have been in some degree felt by every participant, being yourself in someone else's shoes.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has researched and sought to answer the question: How does Civilization VI facilitate player identification with foreign cultures? In this conclusion, I will interpret the research results to come to an answer for the research question. Second, I will provide an answer for the research question and discuss the limitations of this research. Finally, I will discuss future research implications.

5.1 Interpreting results

Empathy

The first element of narrative identification, provided by Cohen for the theoretical framework, that needs to be tackled is empathy (Cohen, 2001). Most players showed signs of being emotionally involved in the game. Nevertheless, there seemed to be some reluctance in admitting this emotional bond, or it might be that players are unaware of the bond whilst playing. It could be that the act is so immersive that players forget their level of involvement. Furthermore, it could be that players do not wish to state they are emotionally involved in a computer game because of the connotations computer games have. The fact that for example Riley found it very confronting when she was presented with her own actions afterwards makes me think that players are so immersed in the game that they don't realize how engaged they are with the game. I myself find that I was at occasions both thoroughly sad and excited whilst playing the game. Concluding, players were emotionally involved and potentially more than they stated in the interviews. The emotional involvement strengthened player identification with the game.

Understanding character

The second element of narrative identification is the understanding of character. The understanding of character varied highly amongst the players and seems to be based mainly upon how much the characters were already familiar to the participants and to which degree the participants could use the special abilities of the characters. Participants varied from intensively sharing or trying to share character goals to a mixture of role positions and ultimately not sharing any character goals. They seem to be based upon the level in which unique abilities can be used, how familiar the character is and how much the character is liked by the participant. But how important these elements are and how they interrelate seems to differ between participants. I cannot yet discern clearly logical correlations between liking a character and understanding them because there is no clear pattern

amongst the participants. Though it seems logical that the disliking of a character does not motivate investing time into understanding the character. What does seem to correlate between the participants is that the afore attained knowledge of a character or nation, positively influences the understanding of that character and nation. The participants that were most unfamiliar with their characters and nations experienced the least amount of understanding of character and nation, for example Capheus and Lito did not know their character at all and said they neither felt the game gave them any understanding of the character. Whereas the participants that already knew their character and nation, such as Kala through her historical knowledge and Riley through a book about the Chinese nation, experienced the highest level of character understanding of all the participants. The correlation between knowing a character and understanding them might also have been connected to similarities between player and character. The higher the similarity is between the character of the player and the role-played character, the easier the identification takes place (Jose & Brewer, 1984).

My own experience playing the game corresponds with these findings. I was very familiar with both Saladin and Arabia and Cleopatra and Egypt and choose them because I liked certain aspect of their character which might have correlated with mine. In effect, I felt as if I understood these characters. But, because the game nearly doesn't portray the role-played characters visually, nor any or their reactions upon the game; most understanding of the role-played character had to come from either my own historical knowledge of the character or through the display of their special abilities. There seems to be a clear correlation between the ability to exercise special game abilities connected to characters and nations and the understanding of character and nation. The more the participants could exercise these special abilities the more they understood their character and nation.

Sharing character goals

The third element of narrative identification is the sharing of character goals. The sharing of goals with characters and nations and the understanding of characters and nations have been very hard to distinguish in the case of this research. In the game *Civilization VI* the special abilities, buildings and units, which allow a player to emphasize the uniqueness of its nation and to follow in the nation and the leader's footsteps, are the best indicators of a player's understanding of and the sharing of goals with these characters and nations. In the interviews, it also became clear that the abilities are directly linked to both the sharing of goals with and understanding of character and nation. It might be that because a game asks a player to act as the identified character that it is inevitable that a correct understanding of the character will result in actions that show a sharing of the character's

goals. In the same manner, sharing a character's goals and enacting them will strengthen the understanding of this character. In other media such as films or books, the sharing of a character's goals and the understanding of a character might be more easily distinguishable because the audience does not need to interact as the character. I myself constructed a kind of narrative in my head that connected the events in the game. This narrative corresponded with my role and gave meaning to the actions of the game. Perhaps this narrative was a way for me to strengthen my role and connect the interactions of the game where an overarching narrative was lacking. Participants also tried to share character goals outside of the special abilities, but this seemed to be more of a mind exercise than any clear interaction with the game. Kala for example wanted to make choices Gandhi would approve of and Riley wanted to protect her people and be loved by them as a good leader, seemingly these were their ways of creating a narrative for themselves. It is unclear to me how this was reflected by their actions, but it shows that in the minds of the participants they were occupied with an idea of being a good leader and sharing the goals of their respective characters, thus creating their own kind of narrative in their minds as well.

Differentiation with others

The next element of narrative identification which clearly shows that players identified with their roles in the game is the way in which they differentiated with computer players. The players, myself included, often seem to consider the computer player almost human in their animosity. The narrative cut scenes portraying these enemy computer players were highly effective in creating this animosity. Players also considered themselves to be of different nations and different kinds of leaders than the computer players, which strengthens the idea that the players identified with their roles through opposition.

Loss of self-awareness

The final element of narrative identification is the loss of self-awareness. All participants seemed to have lost their self-awareness up to some degree. Players of the game seem to be completely occupied by the game whilst playing, sometimes even forgetting actions or statements they made whilst playing the game. Like with a book or film, players of a game seem to become submerged in the fictive world that the game presents. But, the loss of self-awareness in a game seems to be different in a game because players do not completely lose their own perspective. Players lose their sense of time and place up to some degree, but they don't completely lose their own personality.

Self in other other's shoes

Connected to this are the loss of self-awareness are the unexpected results of this research, involving the feeling players experienced of being themselves in someone else's shoes. Players seem to combine their personality with those of the character, whereas in a film or book the audience does lose their personality to identify completely with a character and the narrative according to Cohen. I felt in the same manner as Lito put it, "I was the leader of my own nation". But at the same time, I felt very much as the leader of Egypt and I tried to play as the good trader Cleopatra would have done. It seems that Cohen was right in his assumption that interaction demands a player to include one's own perspective (2001), but this does not necessarily mean that interaction undermines identification. I already disagreed with Cohen in that I believed that any form of identification included contemplation on the self, suggesting that after reading the text the audience would contemplate on the identified character. The results of the research suggest that players do identify with their nations and characters, but it seems in a different way. The identification is more similar to the understanding of Appadurai (2002), being a constant re-evaluation, only not between the self and the public sphere but between the self and the media character. I would argue that players identify with the character by experimenting with what it would be like for themselves to be the character. Like children play with identities through games such as 'playing doctor' (Lauwaert, 2009). Thus, the identification in a play setting might be important for one's own identity because it continually asks the player the question: what would you do? Thereby effectively bringing one's own identity and that of the character together.

The coming together of the self and the game character corresponds with the way in which Gee looks at identification in games. Gee refers to the "tripartite play of identities," which consist of the player's self or own identity, the identity of the character or 'avatar' her or she plays as, and the interplay between the two (2003, p. 58). The interplay between the self and the character is expressed as a projection of the self onto the virtual character. This triple state, in which the virtual character also evolves through playing the videogame, is only applicable for games that feature customizable avatars. However, the mixture of the self and the character identity in games which Gee highlights in the tripartite seems to also be true for games with virtual characters that are fixed. Most likely this difference in identification between more classic cultural forms and the video game is due to the interactional component which forces the player to think based on their own identity. It seems that what de Mul describes as being able to reflect upon the self as another through the point of action and point of view (2015), can be taken more literally than I initially anticipated. Not only is it a mechanism of playing and imagining yourself being another, it seems it is also an identity discussion between character and player.

Player choices

The importance of the interactive component was also apparent in the way that gamer choices affected the identification in the game, the first element of interactive identification. These player choices are also connected to the sharing of character goals and the unique abilities, but they expand more on the way that players can make choices that emulate play form everyday life. By manner of founding a religion, building world wonders and progressing in a certain way through the political and scientific system, a player could choose to mimic real-life or the 'expected play' from a nation in the game. Where this was possible the participants chose to do so, emphasizing the notion that they identified with their role. Sadly, the players often did not progress far enough to be able to make these choices. In my own experience, I always liked to emphasize my uniqueness and the 'feeling' of my nation by making choices that mirror elements I recognized from history.

Appropriation of game mechanics

The appropriation of game mechanics is the second important element of interactive identification with a game. One feature of the game mechanics, the switching between units, was experienced as irritating by all participants and myself. The irritation this feature caused almost led Lito and myself to quit game. It seems that the mechanisms of the game affect the player in their gameplay but do not correspond with the way the gamer wants to make the role-played character of the game act. The inconsistency between the two, when actions don't properly connect with the character, the flow of the game is interrupted (Shaw, 2013, p. 357). When game controls are illogical or counter the players idea of how the character might act they disrupt the flow of identification. I have often experienced in other games that when the controls of a game do not come naturally, much time is devoted to the struggle to understand the controls. A correct appropriation of the game mechanics is necessary to facilitate a proper identification with the game. Luckily, the far greater part of the game mechanics did feel natural and seemed logical to the participants and myself. All participants, myself included, considered themselves to be capable players of the game.

Affordances and effectivities

The final elements of interactive identification are the affordances and effectivities. *Civilization VI* seems to have appealed to all the players, myself included. In terms of the affordances and effectivities of the game, players felt as if they were intended players of the game. The art and gameplay of the game and the playable characters and nations appealed to every player. Thus, the affordances and effectivities were no obstacle for a successful identification with the game. Participants have highlighted that the appeal of the game is due to elements such as the cartoony

style, the graphic and mechanic design of the map, the game music and the character design. It does seem like players chose a character and nation a little bit related to their own character. The more war minded players, Capheus and Lito, chose more war like characters. The more peaceful minded players, Kala, Nomi and Riley, chose more peaceful characters. I myself always love good trading mechanisms in games which would correspond with the choice of Cleopatra. Furthermore, I am intrigued by the great old empires, especially surrounding the middle east, which also corresponds with Saladin and Arabia. Perhaps the affordances the game supplied through the high variety of cultures and nations out of which a player can make a choice, allowed the players to bring their own preferred effectivities to bare in the game, thereby providing a great basis for identification with character and nation.

5.2 Answer of the research question

How does Civilization VI facilitate player identification with foreign characters and nations? The participants and I have all experienced all the elements of narrative and interactive identification, as defined in the theoretical framework. This identification was facilitated in *Civilization VI* by the unique abilities system, elements such as world wonders and religions that mimic every day or historic life, the high variety of cultures to choose from, the usage of historically known figures and nations, the quality of the game to submerge players, the logical game mechanics, the appealing design of the game and the design of the computer player which breeds animosity. The elements that have countered identification in the game are the switching units' mechanism, the lack of cultural detail in the game and the unbalance in availability of special units and buildings in some periods in the game. But what does this mean for the application of games to create cultural awareness.

The most important finding of this research is that identification has a clear relation with the implication of game play, visible in *Civilization VI* through the special abilities system, the unique buildings and units as well as the world wonders, religion, science and political system. Participants where clearly able to identify better with their role-played characters and nations when they were able to use the special abilities system extensively in the game. Connecting gameplay and culture evidently provides a strong motivation to investigate and use cultural concepts, such as the 'Iteru' special ability I used playing as Cleopatra. Players also enjoyed using these special elements and preferred diversifying themselves from others by doing so. The high emotional involvement I felt in building, for example, the pyramids wonder with Egypt, shows how invested I was with the cultural gameplay elements. This means that games have the unique ability to use the element of play, and the joy that play entails, to strengthen identification and create cultural awareness. Furthermore, a

game player does not only have to understand cultural game play elements, the player has to know how to affectively apply them, often in multiple different situations. This means that the player needs a thorough understanding of the cultural elements in order to effectively use them to win the game. This thorough understanding strengthens the sustainability of the cultural awareness which the game creates. Applying this potential that games hold in multicultural societies should be a primary concern of game studies.

Another crucially important finding of this research is that game identification differs, considering the loss of self-awareness, from the identification in other media texts. The interactional component of games brings the self to the forefront because the player needs to think from his own frame of mind. Where Cohen surmised that the inclusion of the self would negate identification, I find that it strengthens identification by opening a discussion between the self and the role-played character. Like Appadurai suggests, the opposition between the self and the other strengthens the absorption of the role-played character into the player's own identity. Identification in games includes the defining of the self in opposition with the other, the dimensional component of culture (2002). The participants did not feel like they were playing as themselves, nor did they feel like they were embodying their role-played characters. They were adopting some of the viewpoints of the role-played character and mixing them with their own thoughts. The result is a mixture of the identity of the game character and that of the player (Gee, 2003). Playing is about testing or trying on a different identity (Lauwaert, 2009) whilst mimicking play from real life (Mul, 2015).The game supplied the players with the ability to step into the shoes of a world leader and experience with what it would be like for themselves to adapt to the game role. I believe that the identification that the game hereby evokes has greater consequences for the audience's personal identities than identification in which the players complete lose their own self.

Another noteworthy finding is that the absence in games of an all dominating narrative that structures the text narrative allows for the player to create a personal narrative that accompanies the player's interaction with the game. While playing, I created a narrative in my mind that gave meaning to the interactions that I made in the game. For example, I created a narrative concerning a power struggle between America, my arch enemy, and me (Egypt). This narrative gave meaning to the many and long wars that I fought with America in the game. Similarly, Riley created a narrative of being loved by the inhabitants of her cities to accompany her actions of progressing the city. The personal narratives are a good example of how the dimensional aspect of culture is established in the imagination (Yuen, 2011). Furthermore, the personal narratives did not seem to be based solely on the narrative of the game, which was only concerned with special abilities of characters and nations

and the winning of the game. The personal narratives where often not connected to winning the game at all. However, the portrayal of the enemy players and other elements of the game narrative did foster the personal narratives. It seems that the creation of personal narratives can be considered to fall in the periphery of play, an unintentional mode of playing that does not hinder the successful completion of the game. This might be perfectly exemplified in the way that I made use of the sphinx building, playing as Cleopatra. When I played as Egypt I wished to build a sphinx building in all of my cities, even when this was not beneficial for me to winning the game and therefore not intended by the game designers. The desire for me to do this come from the creation of an Egyptian narrative in my mind, in which every citizen wants to be able to access a sphinx. The example of the Sphinx also shows how these personal narratives could strengthen the identification with foreign cultural elements in the game.

These findings, the identification through the cultural gameplay mechanics, the identification trough the discussion between the self and the role-played character and the personal narrative, rely on the unique play or interactional element of games. They show how crucial the interactional component is in games for the identification process and the spread of cultural awareness. In this sense, the results of this research have brought me closer to the position of the ludologists in the academic debate between ludology and narratology. However, the narrative of the game evidently also elicited identification and strengthened the interactive identification. Without the historical narrative that surrounded, for example, Egypt, the pyramids and the sphinx building, I would have never been as engaged in building the pyramids or a sphinx building in every city. That being said, the findings above do show how important the unique interactional component of games is for the process of identification and its potential to spread cultural awareness. This research has shown that games have a unique potential to enforce the spread of sustainable cultural awareness by combining both interactive and narrative identification.

5.3 Limitations

One of the biggest limitations of this research was the time. The time that I had available limited the amount of games I could ask the participants to play. I would have liked every participant to have played two different games. Multiple sessions would have allowed me to establish an even closer relationship with the participants to get the most truthful answers. Multiple sessions would also have familiarized the participants more with the game. The amount of time spent playing the game in one session was also limiting. Many players were not able to progress far enough in the game to make use of all their special abilities in the four hours of gameplay. In an ideal situation, every participant would have played the game until its end. Since playing until the end of the game can take up more

than twenty-four hours, this was not possible considering also the observations and interviews. The span of time it takes to master a videogame can cover weeks. To limit the influence the time factor had on the research I included my own experience as a proficient player of the game. If there would have been more time available I would also have liked to make a comparison between *Civilization VI* and another similar game. I was also not able to go into the depths of the game community and game culture surrounding *Civilization VI*. So as not to brush over this aspect I choose to conduct the research with first time players of *Civilization VI*.

Because of the limited time and the unexperienced participants, I explained the game to the players. This was beneficial for a quicker adaptation of the game and its rules and mechanics so that the players could progress further in the game. I tried to refrain from influencing any tactical decisions but it could be that I have influenced the participants in making some early game choices. In the beginning many participants required a lot of explanation, whereas, later in the game, I could refrain from commenting and solely observe the participants. Furthermore, because the research was conducted amongst friends I was able to go into deeper conversation and to detail the experience of people in my surrounding. At the same time, it might have been my relationship with the participants influenced the answers they provided.

Another limitation is that Civilization VI does not have cultural gameplay elements in great supply. In the game that has sprouted the interest of this research, *Age of Mythology*, the player needed to know and rely on the culture and mythologies of several different nations to be able to win the game. Every nation played in a complete different style. This might be a big part of the reason I still know these mythologies by heart. In *Civilization VI* the utilization of the uniqueness of nations is a choice, although extremely beneficial to winning the game. Some players even lost sight of the special abilities whilst playing. Therefore, *Civilization VI* showcases the high potential of games to identify with foreign cultures, nations and characters, but it does not utilize it to its full extend. Despite the high focus of *Civilization* on historical accurateness and diverse cultures. The key game elements one uses to play and win the game, such as units, buildings, technologies etc., are too general; every nation exhibits the same. The cultural and historical knowledge would be more telling and would have a bigger impact on the player when it was thoroughly connected to the gameplay and the winning of the game. *Civilization VI* also did not feature its characters much in the game. This might have strengthened the player's perception of being the world leader themselves. But the lack of character knowledge makes it hard to understand and therefore identify with the role-played character. More extensive background stories might facilitate better identification with the game and its characters.

Finally, *Civilization VI* is not the ultimate perfect vehicle to spread cultural knowledge because of its western bias and its focus on the historical process. However, every text is an interpretation of history and culture, biased by its creator. The game encompasses many different game elements and therefore it seems an impossible job to differentiate them between all the unique cultures and nations that are in the game. To improve on spreading cultural awareness in games, a game should be more concerned with accurate cultural representation. Furthermore, the cultural biases of *Civilization VI* and participant cultural concerns evidence that the game is not as disconnected from the highly politicized cultural sphere as surmised in the introduction. Lito, for example, did not want to identify with the character of Gilgamesh because he knew that the existence of this character was doubted. Or, even more telling, the example of Riley, who did not wish to role-play America because of her dislike of the current president Donald Trump. Perhaps future research could investigate how much games are influenced by the highly politicized public sphere.

5.4 Future research implications

This research has provided insight into play and identification in computer games, but it cannot yet establish a grounded theory that encompasses all the different aspects of identification and play in video games. I hope this research has provided an elaboration on the process of identification in games by combining narrative and interaction. To understand this subject more thoroughly one of the next steps could be to combine the player experience with a screen-text analysis (Caldwell, 2009). This research has shown that for example the portrayal of enemy computer players and the visualization of cultural components affects the immersion and identification of the players of the game. To understand this mechanic, an analysis of the different screen components is required. Such a screen-text analysis could also incorporate the intentions of game developers and designers in constructing the game and promoting identification. It would be beneficial to understand how game designers wish to stimulate identification through narrative and interaction.

Furthermore, this research contained a specific case study of the turn-based strategy game *Civilization VI*. Another kind of game such as a first-person action shooter or an open world game might have a thoroughly different process of identification. In a turn-based strategy game the narrative is highly dependent on the interaction of the player and whether or not they succeed in winning the game. In a game such as *Assassins Creed* the entire narrative is fixed, the player can only influence the pace and sometimes the sequence in which the narrative unfolds. A next step in understanding identification in computer games would be to test different sorts of games and platforms.

For the valuable spread of cultural awareness in games it is also necessary to look closer at the way in which video games still represent mainly dominant western views. Not only does western dominance influence the content of games (Uricchio, 2005; Voorhees, 2009), the cultural categorization of different groups of gamers, such as the characteristic extreme Asian gamer (Wirman, 2016), are also likely to influence game content and structure. Understanding the cultural biases of different games might help overcome them and might stimulate the creation of culturally less biased games. The terms game and gamer still have a lot of negative connotations (Yates & Littleton, 1999). The basis of this research could also be used to research how game affordances influence the willingness of different genders, ethnicities and classes to play the game (1999). This research also found that the participants were hesitant to admit their level of commitment to the game. Researching how these connotations affect players and their willingness to engage with games would also be beneficial for debunking the myth's surrounding games and gamers and for bringing games to a larger audience.

Finally, the believe that games provide an opportunity for spreading cultural awareness has driven this research. To thoroughly test this believe it would be necessary to follow participants over a longer period of time to investigate whether the identification in the game leads to an alteration in the participants cultural understanding. This research shows that games can provide a chance to identify with game characters of foreign cultures. The interaction element of games seems to offer the player the opportunity to 'try on' a different identity and explore how they would operate in another person's shoes. It would be interesting to test this theory further and explore how games affect player's identities after playing the game. One might also analyse, as mentioned, how games could be a form of affective communication that influences the public sphere (Mc Guigan, 2005). The affective relations between games, players and the public sphere need to be understood. The ultimate goal would be to understand the cultural impact computer games might have, as one of the new and increasingly popular media outputs, on societies greater cultural understanding influencing the cultural public sphere. In order for games to become media texts that provide critical intervention (Mc Guigan, 2005), more research on the impact of games on the politics of the cultural public sphere is needed.

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